

2018

Everyday Occupations: Traffic, Hazards, And Mobility In The West Bank

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EVERYDAY OCCUPATIONS: TRAFFIC, HAZARDS, AND MOBILITY IN THE WEST
BANK

by

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Bachelor of Arts
University of Iowa, 2018

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts in

Geography

College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

2018

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ABSTRACT

Mobility in the West Bank is inherently tied to the Israeli military occupation. Each new stage of the decades old conflict comes with new implications for the way Palestinians move around the West Bank. The past years have seen a transition during which the severe mobility restrictions that constituted the closure policy of the second intifada eased and intercity travel has increased. In this study I examine day-to-day experiences of mobility in the West Bank in the post-closure period. In doing so I highlight the ways in which routine experiences of mobility, those with traffic, road hazards, and infrastructure, bring elements on the Israeli occupation to the forefront of Palestinian experiences and conscience. I suggest that some of the static boundaries and binaries that have formed the lens through which scholars have viewed Palestinian experiences miss complexities and dynamics that become hyper visible through an examination of the everyday.

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INTRODUCTION

“People are afraid to leave Nablus,” Yousef told me, reflecting on the recent increase in military presence on the road between the West Bank cities of Nablus and Ramallah. I sat with Yousef, a taxi controller in Nablus, one evening in the summer of 2017 in his office as he complained about the recent decrease in business. The door to the office was left ajar allowing a string of his drivers to cycle in and out of the small, dusty room. Some asked quick, work related questions, while others lingered, jumping into the interview and supplementing Yousef’s perspective with their own. It became clear that the deadly clash in Jerusalem between several Palestinians and Israeli soldiers several days before had radiating consequences. By the time I spoke with Yousef a week later, the clash had indirectly caused a decrease in taxi ridership. He said the riders were afraid of the problems they might encounter along the way, and thus opted to stay home.

The city of Nablus was under complete military closure for two years during the early 2000s with no one being let in or out of the city without permission from the Israeli military. Mobility restrictions were so severe that many Nabulsis were unable to leave the city for the entire two years. Considering this, Yousef’s comment stood out as a shift in the way people from Nablus experience mobility restrictions. Whereas in the past, Palestinian mobility was obstructed by blockades and bans, this observation reflected a different kind of barrier; one that is based in uncertainty and fear. Comments like this required me to consider Palestinian mobility not in terms of physical barriers along the

road, but rather the way a variety of barriers, both physical and not, impact the experience of moving throughout the West Bank.

In this study, I argue that intercity travel in the West Bank brings Palestinians into close proximity with the Israeli occupation and that this proximity foregrounds the power imbalances, distrust and competing narratives of the occupation as a tangible component of Palestinian experiences of mobility. Though broadly my argument centers on the connection between mobility and the occupation, I also highlight ways in which intercity mobility can foreground similar inequity and distrust within Palestinian society itself. I explore this through the themes of slowing down, getting stuck and getting by and highlight experiences centering on traffic, road hazards, and way finding infrastructures, which illuminate how the occupation shapes the experience of traveling on the highway system in the West Bank.

In the remainder of the introduction, I give a brief history of the road network in Palestine and the various ways Palestinians utilize it. This is followed by an overview of scholarly work that frames my understanding of mobility and road infrastructure. I end by establishing previous work on the issue of Palestinian mobility as the foundation from which my own research departs and by giving an outline of the chapters to follow. Here I highlight the fact that while Palestinian mobility has been a subject of study in terms of specific checkpoints (Tawil-Souri, 2011; Abourahme (2011) and the larger impacts of mobility restrictions on Palestinian society (Brown, 2004; Eklund, 2011), the topic of everyday mobility which remains focused on the act of moving around the West Bank, but steps outside of the a frame limited to checkpoints has yet to be explored.

Barriers and Borders: The West Bank Road Network

The mobility of Palestinians in the West Bank is closely tied to the Israeli occupation. As the occupation has progressed through various phases of violence or relative calm, the ability of Palestinians to move around the West Bank has transformed to reflect the policies of the time. Tension is a constant, palpable presence in the West Bank and yet it is often dulled or obfuscated by the monotony of daily life. The periods of 1987-1991 and 2000-2007 known as the first and second intifada, respectively, are notable exceptions to this ‘cold conflict’ where hostilities rose to the point of violent clashes and significant casualties (Zeitoun, 2007). Both intifadas also left lasting legacies on the state of Palestinian mobility. The legacy of the first intifada lies in its role in bringing about the Oslo Peace Accords. The Oslo agreement, signed in 1993, largely in reaction to the violence of the first intifada, dramatically changed the power structures within the West Bank by implementing a system of political and geographical fragmentation. The agreement divided the West Bank into Areas A, B and C with Area A under autonomous Palestinian Authority (PA) control, Area C under Israeli control, and Area B functioning under a joint control (Weizman, 2007; B'Tselem, 2013, Hass, 2002). This separation extends to the infrastructure system with the major roadways connecting cities within the West Bank falling under Israeli control, regardless of whether they pass through Area A or B. Conversely, the control of smaller connective roadways and city/village streets depends entirely on the designation of the surrounding area. Figure 0.1 highlights the overlap between Israeli controlled Area C and the major roadways of the West Bank. The map on the left shows, in the darker brown color, the area of the West Bank that is under Israeli control (Area C). The map on the right highlights the major highways of the West

Bank. A comparison of the two maps shows that the major highways correspond with Area C designation. This is particularly clear in the two highlighted areas in the northwest between Jenin, Nablus, and Tulkarm and in the southwest in the area surrounding Hebron.

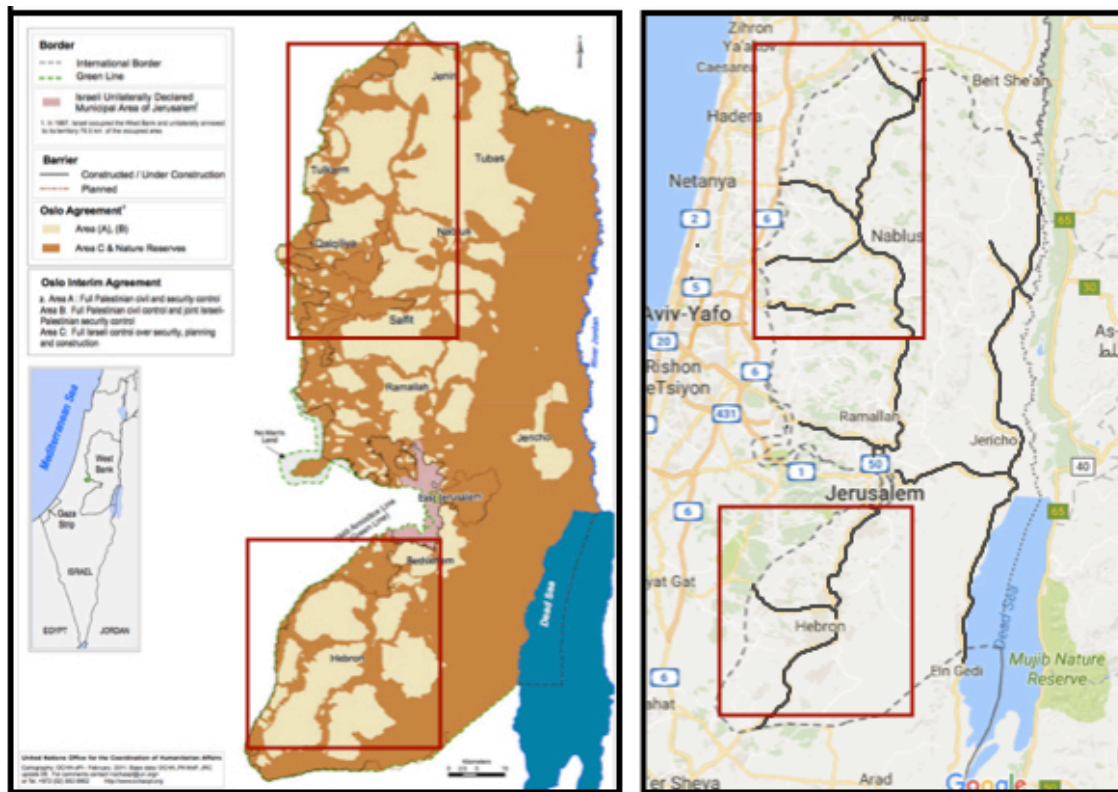


Figure 0.1 Area C and Major Roads The map on the left shows Area C in brown and Areas A and B in tan. (Source: OCHA). The map on the right shows the major highways in the West Bank. (Source: Google Maps).

What is not shown on this map is the wider network of roads controlled by the Palestinian Authority, which connect the population centers with surrounding villages. These Palestinian controlled roads are generally poorer in quality and feature less signage as well as a total absence of Israeli checkpoints. These roads also follow more difficult terrain and have lower speed limits. From driving style to trip length, studies have documented significant differences in the navigation of Israeli and Palestinian controlled

roads (Bishara, 2015; Eklund & Al-Atrash, 2013). This distribution of power and control is one of the primary factors that ties mobility so intrinsically to infrastructure in the West Bank (Weizman, 2007; United Nations, 2007).

Like its predecessor, the second intifada changed the landscape of West Bank mobility by further fragmenting the highway system through the Israeli military policy of “closure.”¹ The closure policy, first implemented by the Israeli military during the second intifada, features a system of physical barriers called ‘closure obstacles’ by the United Nations (OCHA 2016). These include manned military checkpoints as well as roadblocks such as gates and earth mounds, which allow the military to close a road temporarily (gates) or permanently (earth mounds) without the presence of military personnel. The closure policy peaked in 2003 with nearly 750 obstacles within the West Bank (United Nations, 2007). While the policy has eased since the end of the second intifada, as of 2016, 543 barriers remained in the West Bank (OCHA, 2016).

When I discuss checkpoints in my analysis, I am referring to permanent checkpoints. Most permanent checkpoints feature several lanes divided by raised curb partitions. On each of these dividers sits what looks like a tollbooth where soldiers are meant to stand, checking IDs and waving cars through (See figure 0.2). As of 2017, there are 59 permanent checkpoints in the West Bank (B'Tselem, 2017).

Roads fragmented by checkpoints can inhibit the flow of people within the West Bank, however they do not do so uniformly. Checkpoints can be open—letting all vehicles through, closed—letting no vehicles through, or a mixture of the two in which some vehicles are let through while others are detained or prohibited from passing. If a

¹ Also referred to as the Al-Aqsa Intifada

vehicle is detained, typically the Israeli soldier will ask for everyone in the vehicle's IDs. Once these are checked, the vehicle will either be let go or directed to pull to the side of the road where the soldiers perform a more detailed check of the car including the undercarriage and any luggage the travelers may be carrying. Though determining a typical delay is difficult due to extreme variability Eklund & Al Atrash suggest that a minimum 15-minute delay can be taken into account for each checkpoint along a route (Eklund & Al Atrash, 2012). These closures are unpredictable for Palestinian travelers and can double the travel time of an intercity trip.



Figure 0.2 Checkpoint Photo of the DCO checkpoint, which serves as an entrance/exit point for the city of Ramallah Source: Thomas Coex/ AFP

The result of the two intifadas is the Israeli military's implementation of what Halper (1999) refers to as a 'matrix of control.' The matrix is a nested system of nodes in the form of checkpoints and other closure obstacles embedded within fragmented administrative zones. The combination of these two allows the Israeli military an overall control of the West Bank and the mobility of Palestinians. It is this matrix of control that

makes the Israeli military presence so pervasive in the experience of travel in the West Bank.

Moving along the roads in the West Bank are a range of personal vehicles, privately owned shared taxis (*servises*) and public buses. *Servises* are seven passenger vans that travel between major population areas. Within each city in the West Bank, there are one or more *servis* stations. Here, drivers gather and call out the name of the city they are going to in order to attract passengers. There is no set schedule for departures and the *servis* only leaves when it becomes full or, if the *servis* is slow to fill up, the passengers communally agree to pay more to cover an empty seat. Once the *servis* is full, the driver sets out toward the destination city on a route of his own choosing. The endpoint is always the *servis* station in the destination city, however passengers may signal a stop at anytime and the driver will then pick up more passengers along the way. While the *servis* drivers have a set point of origin and destination and generally follow the same routes, they also occasionally deviate from these routes, particularly to avoid checkpoints. The *servis* drivers are uniformly male, generally range in age from 25-55, and are working class. Limited access to private vehicles makes these *servises* a fundamental part of intercity travel in Palestine.

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics found that only 26% of Palestinians own a private vehicle in 2016. While car ownership remains low, it has been rising since the end of the severe mobility restrictions during the second intrifada, a fact which contributes to the increased stress in the West Bank roads. In addition to personal cars, other alternatives to *servis* travel include informal carpool arrangements in which travelers pay the owner of a private vehicle for rides between cities as well as larger

buses. These buses are owned by private companies and function in a similar way to *servises* but are both less expensive and less flexible in terms of departure time and route.

Literature Review

I situate this work between two main bodies of literature: scholarship on mobility and scholarship on roads and infrastructure.

Placing Mobility

Contemporary scholarship on mobility has argued that in order for mobility to be fully understood, research must consider not only the physical action of movement, but also the experience and social dynamics of such a move (Bissell, 2010; Bissell, 2016; Cidell & Lechtenberg, 2016; Cresswell, 2010; Law, 1999). Tim Cresswell's work is arguably the most influential contribution to the geographic study of mobility of the last 20 years (Kwan and Schwanen 2016). Cresswell's definition of mobility is the embodied or experienced physical movement that has social meaning and is part of a larger societal fabric (Cresswell, 2006, 3).

A place, in geographical theory, inherently has meaning and holds power as well as being something that we experience in comparison with abstract space, which is natural and unattached to social meanings. Cresswell asserts that mobility is a dynamic form of place, imbued with power imbalances, performance, and competing narratives (Cresswell, 2006, 3). I employ this as the conceptual framework for my research, using my observations and interviews to examine the *experience* of Palestinian mobility between two places. I approach mobility, therefore, both as the act of movement itself and the experiences along the way, taking into consideration the entire journey as a place.

As Cresswell puts it, if movement alone is getting from point A to point B, then mobility is a third and separate entity-the line between the two (Cresswell, 2006, 2).

Making Mobile Places: The Car and the Road

The car and the road are both essential to understanding intercity mobility as a whole. Both have the capacity to impact the experience of mobility and bring power structures and inequity into those experiences. One of the more prominent sub-fields of transportation geography is the study of automobility, which has seen the recent development of a selection of research exploring the relationship between automobility or car travel and inequity. Rajan's (2006) analysis affirms that while automobility serves as an important basis for citizenship, the extension of such citizenship is not uniformly distributed, particularly concerning marginalized groups. Seiler (2016) echoes this assertion, highlighting the ways in which automobility in the United States is inherently unequal for African Americans who experience far more risks and obstacles to mobility than white Americans. Seiler (2016) points to tactics with a focus on the *Negro Motorist Green Book* that African Americans used to push back upon such restrictions.² Both Rajan and Seiler argue that mobility and particularly automobility exposes marginalized groups to inequity caused by the social and political structures in which it occurs.

While automobility scholarship has drawn connections between transportation and inequality, other transportation geographers have focused on documenting the experience and atmosphere within units of transportation. David Bissell's work on public

² *The Negro Motorist Green Book* or *The Green Book* as it is commonly referred to was a travel guidebook produced from 1936 to 1966. The book included businesses that would accommodate African Americans in the segregated American South (though eventually it included the entire United States).

transportation provides an analysis of experienced mobility and social interaction within public transportation spaces. Bissell focuses on atmosphere within public transportation systems and highlights how non-discursive affective actions such as facial expression as well as time and type of travel can have a significant impact on the experience of mobility for passengers (Bissell, 2010). Laurier et al (2008), on the other hand provides a detailed analysis of how dialogue can also influence experiences of mobility and—of particular relevance to my research—how issues outside of the car, such as traffic or passing a known location, affects the environment inside the car. Bissell (2006) and Laurier et al (2008) approach the topic from two extremes in terms of transportation units with Bissell using public train cars carrying over 50 passengers as his unit of analysis and Laurier using privately owned vehicles with not more than 3 occupants. There is limited data on public transportation systems that bridge this divide such as shared taxis.

In addition to the car, road infrastructure too plays a significant role in mobility and thus can similarly create regimes of inequality. Brian Larkin defines infrastructure as “matter than enables the movement of other matter,” (Larkin, 2013, pg. 2). There is a growing section of infrastructure literature that highlights the role of infrastructure as having the ability to impact social and political processes, create or deny citizenship and imprint an effect on experienced mobility (Larkin, 2013; Jensen, 2009). In his review of current scholarly work, Larkin (2013) describes infrastructure as being “loosened from technical function. Infrastructures are the means by which a state proffers these representations to its citizens and asks them to take those representations as social facts” (Larkin, 2013, pg. 335). Infrastructures not only allow movement, but also shape the way movement occurs and is experienced. Fully fleshing out the literature on the political

impacts of infrastructure is a body of work concerning infrastructure's connection to the political realm, and class and citizenship specifically (Anand, 2011; Anand, 2017, Von Schnitzler, 2008; Seiler, 2016). Von Schnitzler's analysis of prepaid electricity meters in South Africa and Anand's research on access to water in Mumbai demonstrate how engaging with infrastructure heightens the visibility of systems of inequality based on access which in turn cause distrust and contention between people and the state.

Roads too have this capacity to bring people into conversation with the state. Mrázek's (2002) analysis of Dutch colonial roads asserts the necessity of understanding unintended functions of road infrastructure by demonstrating that the physical qualities of the road itself can not only project a political message but can impact the way mobility is experienced. Shaking off the technical function allows for an analysis that connects the act of moving from one place to another and what the experience actually looks like.

In his analysis of road infrastructure in Palestine, Omar Jabary Salamanca (2015) argues that road infrastructure is pervasive in its ability to impose control, particularly in a colonial or imperial context. Focusing on Road 443, a major highway within the West Bank that only Israeli settlers are permitted to use, Salamanca demonstrates the ability of certain road infrastructures to impose a kind of segregation that relegates the Palestinian population to a lower class. Salamanca details how the Israeli architects of the road infrastructure system describe the process as establishing 'facts on the ground.' (Salamanca, 2015, 119). He stresses the importance of focusing on the everyday interaction between the Palestinian population and the infrastructure system, which he characterizes as both causing dispossession and being met with resistance (Salamanca, 2015, 132). While Salamanca provides a thorough analysis of the inequalities built into

the infrastructure of the West Bank, in this study I offer an ethnographic perspective on such inequality manifesting into the experience of Palestinian mobility.

Methods

My study draws on ethnographic fieldwork, which I conducted over the course of 9 weeks from late May to early August, 2017. The bulk of my analysis is based on data from observations and semi-structured interviews. The observation data comes primarily from trips I took on intercity *servis* between Nablus and Ramallah roughly 10 times per week (For a map showing the route as well as the checkpoints along the way see Figure 0.3). The journey takes from 45 minutes to 2 hours, depending on the conditions of the road. I conducted my observations at various times during the day. On a few occasions I made the same journey in a private vehicle. In addition to these observations I draw on data from 9 semi-structured interviews with *servis* drivers, passengers, and controllers. I also include data from the dozens of informal conversations on the topic of mobility I engaged in during my research. Beyond the contacts at the *servis* station, I primarily utilized the social network I have built over the past 10 years of working and conducting research in the West Bank. Additionally, through these deep personal relationships, I have placed myself within a social network of non-English speaking Palestinians, which made possible the dozens of informal conversations on the topic of mobility, which informed my research. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and 90 minutes and was conducted either in Arabic with the assistance of a translator or in English.

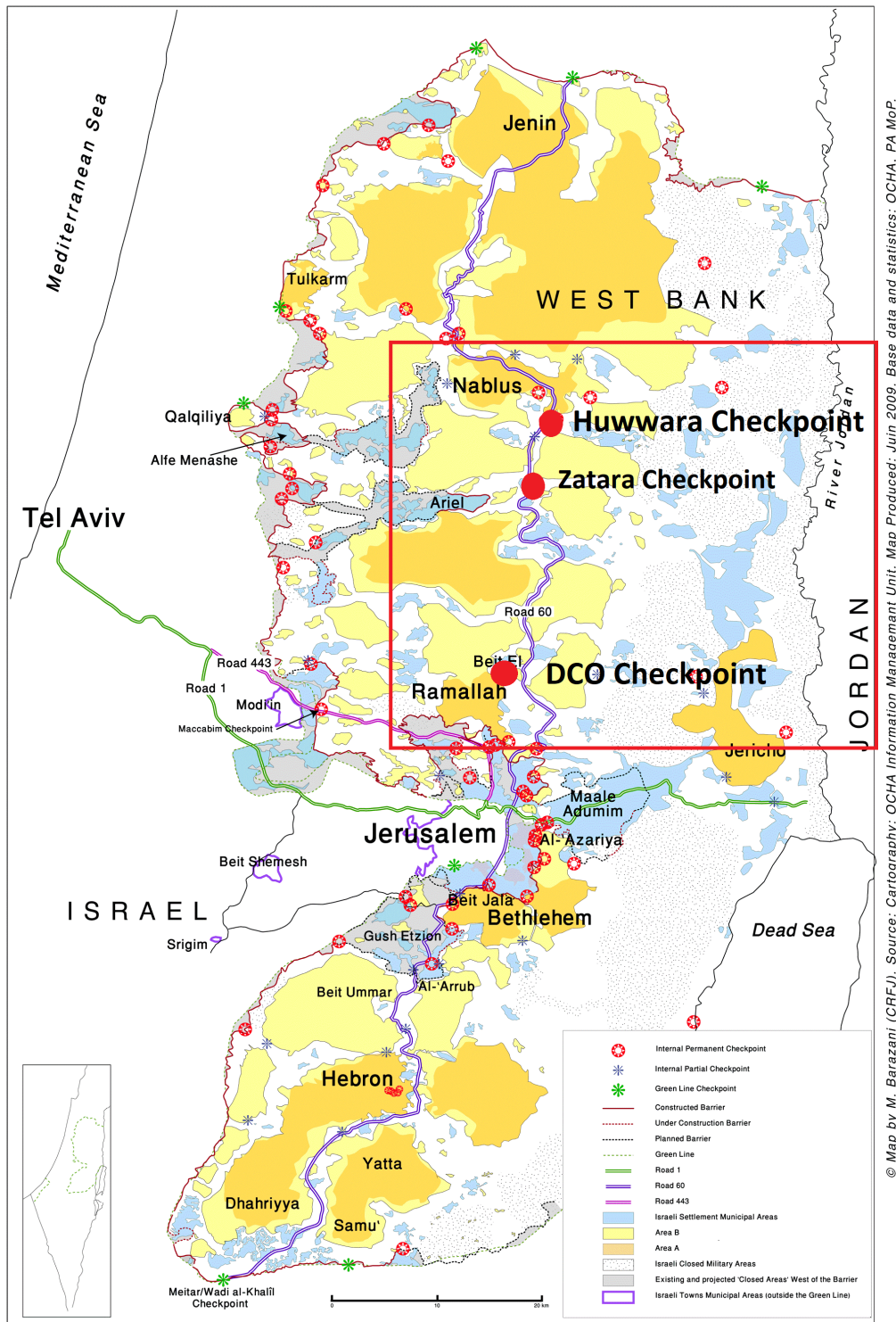


Figure 0.3. Map of the West Bank with the Nablus-Ramallah route featured
Source: OCHA, Map by M Barazani

Experienced Mobility in Palestine

In both the academic literature and humanitarian monitoring, mobility in Palestinian has garnered a great deal of attention since the beginning of the closure policy. Many scholars have focused on how closure obstacles impact the way Palestinians move within the West Bank with checkpoints drawing particular notice. These studies focus on checkpoints as a place of waiting or delayed travel (Eklund and El-Atrash; Peteet, 2018; Tawil-Souri 2011; Wick, 2011) or the negative impacts checkpoints have on Palestinian lives in terms of economic constraints or experienced humiliation (Brown 2004; Longo, Canetti, and Hite-Rubin 2014). Tawil-Souri (2011) and Abourahme (2011) provide an in-depth study of mobility at a specific checkpoint, both providing a rich ethnography of Qalandia Checkpoint. The result of such studies is a robust literature concerning the impact of checkpoints on Palestinian mobility.

With the easing of the closure policy however, checkpoints no longer dominate the experience of mobility in Palestine the way they did during the early 2000s. Taking Cresswell's (2006) framework of mobility as place, the entire journey between point A and point B should be taken considered rather than any specific space within that journey. Both at and beyond checkpoints, road travel within the West Bank is rife with interactions with the Israeli military and imbued with systemic inequality and distrust.

Bishara (2015) provides an ethnographic study of road travel in Israel and Palestine that demonstrates the close connection between the entirety of Palestinian mobility and the inequalities of the occupation. Bishara adopts an embodied perspective on mobility and examines the subaltern knowledge that the closure policy produces. Her study provides an analysis of mobility in the West Bank and Israel using five individual

trips in private vehicles, most of which ended in a tourist destination or an event the author was attending.

My research builds on Bishara's ethnographic approach to the experience of Palestinian mobility, but departs from it in two key ways. First, my research is based on observations from 70 days of travel, rather than specific instances of note, allowing me to explore routine, daily movement. Second, by focusing on *servis* rather than car travel, I access a much more common form of transportation. The low rates of car ownership in the West Bank means that regular travel in private vehicles is still only available to a limited portion of the Palestinian population.

I approach Palestinian mobility with a focus on themes that target specific ways in which Palestinians are regularly exposed to the Israeli occupation and how this exposure is tied to experienced inequality.³ Chapter 1 focuses on traffic caused by checkpoints, junctions and street protests. Here I connect slowing down as a routine element of Palestinian travel to a pervasive presence of the Israeli occupation, despite the loosening of the closure policy. My second chapter centers on hazards that impede mobility, highlighting both traffic accidents and breakdowns. In managing these stoppages, Palestinians are exposed to uncertainty associated with administrative fragmentation and the military's inequitable provision of services between Palestinians and Israeli settlers. These inequities, as well as some that exist within Palestinian society, are further examined through a discussion of who is to blame for accidents. Chapter 3 provides a

³ Apart from the opening interlude, my discussion of mobility includes the experience intercity travel by Palestinians. I do not discuss mobility within Palestinian cities or the perspectives of Israeli settlers or military personnel in my account. I conducted my research in the north of the West Bank and thus the experience of intercity travel elsewhere in the West Bank, particularly in the areas surrounding Jerusalem, may include factors not common along the Nablus-Ramallah route.

perspective on the various methods Palestinians use to get around the mobility limitations presented in the previous two chapters. I discuss both detours and cell phones as infrastructures for getting by and what their use implies about the connection between the occupation and Palestinian mobility.

INTERLUDE: TRAFFIC IN THE CITY

Sitting in traffic in downtown Nablus, the atmosphere has an air of chaos. On a late summer afternoon the roads are dense with human activity. Cars are brimming with people, children on laps often leaning out the window to catch some breeze. *Servis* taxis with commuters glancing at their phones or dozing off in the heat pass trucks headed for the Old City market carrying kilos of eggplants or zucchinis. Police officers in military style uniforms lean against palm trees in the medians, chatting with one another. While not lawless, the roads are largely laneless. The right of way is negotiated with horns, gestures, and yells. The traffic moves slowly enough that pedestrians can walk around the cars as if they were parked.

In the mornings and the late afternoons, men dressed in red vests embroidered with gold thread sell coffee, carrying an elaborate gold coffee pot on their backs that extends from their waist to above their head, and a belted tray that holds small paper cups. The sellers capitalize on the gridlock, walking between the cars, clinking together metal cups in a rhythm that blends with the horns and car radios. While any fragment of the traffic seems chaotic, the road taken as a whole moves with a steady flow. Additionally, when considered day after day, the traffic is actually a regular, a stable part of the city.

When living in an apartment building in the heart of downtown Nablus, I never used an alarm clock. Even on the sixth floor, this staccato cadence of horns, clinking

cups, and a short jingle denoting a news flash coming from car radios permeated closed windows. I awoke to the sound of people on the move, which, as is often the case in Palestine, was the sound of traffic.

CHAPTER 1: SLOWING DOWN

Cresting a hill just north of Ramallah, the *servis* I was riding in came to a stop behind a string of cars lined up a road that ran along the peak of a tall ridge. The ground to the west fell away in a terraced descent to a deep valley, leaving nothing to block the late afternoon sun from beating through the glass. It was a hot day and the *servis* had no air conditioning. As the *servis* came to a stop, so too did the breeze coming in through the open windows. Seated in the back of the *servis* fanning myself with my notebook, I complained to my friend sitting next to me that this summer, the traffic was worse than I had seen in the previous few years. My friend, a Palestinian man who now lives in Malaysia replied, “This is nothing, in Malaysia it takes two hours to get anywhere.” I was surprised. I had discussed my research with this friend numerous times and he had expressed extreme discomfort about traveling on roads between cities, but was now dismissing the traffic as insignificant. He later clarified that his discomfort came not from the time delay traffic causes, but rather from how it brought him in close physical proximity to the occupation and increased the probability of interacting with Israeli soldiers.

My friend was on vacation and thus did not need to fit his transportation to a tight schedule. This, combined with his experience sitting in Malaysian traffic, made the time delays associated with such traffic jams a slight annoyance, but not the focal point of his experience traveling around the West Bank. For others, and particularly those who need

their travel time to fit into a set schedule, these time delays cause major issues. *Servis* drivers are particularly affected by traffic as their income depends on maximizing the number of trips they can take in one day. Several drivers commented that now that checkpoints are generally open and they are subject to less extensive scrutiny, traffic has taken their place as the primary problem on the road.

This chapter focuses on two different causes of traffic: traffic caused by checkpoints or junctions and traffic caused by protests. In the West Bank, the cause of traffic is inherently linked to its effects; traffic caused by checkpoints is experienced differently and has different results than that caused by protests. In highlighting these causes of traffic in Palestine I assert two main points. First, though the closure policy has eased, elements of the occupation still play a role in the manner and speed with which Palestinian move through the West Bank. Second, because such traffic increases the tangible role the occupation plays in Palestinian life, so too does it heighten the level of exposure to the inequities and political narratives of the occupation overall.

Checkpoints and Junctions

There are certain sections of the route between Nablus and Ramallah that I know with intimate detail. One is a slow curve up a hill that hugs a small village, made up of less than a dozen houses. A third of the way up the hill, a billboard comes into view on the left which, this summer, featured an advisement for a Palestinian ice cream company introducing two new flavors of ice cream bar, one strawberry and the other cookies and cream. The right side of the road is flanked by a rock wall and battered guardrail that has clearly survived several impacts. A string of telephone wire traces along the left side.

Another deeply familiar section of road lies on the north side of Ramallah as you exit the city. The edge of the road is jagged and unfinished. The shoulder is pocked with pot holes and lined with a mix of sand colored rocks and dusty shrubs whose muted colors are interrupted irregularly by the bright blues and reds of plastics bags, candy wrappers, and other pieces of trash that line the road. Next to a sharp, ninety degree turn a dumpster stands in the road, with worn-away orange paint, always surrounded by wooden pallets and other debris. Directly ahead a road turns along the last ridge of mountains before the Jordan River Valley.

This level of familiarity with the road is not uniform along the whole route nor is it devoted to particularly interesting sections. It is instead born out of the hours spent crawling along these particular stretches of road, caught in traffic jams. Both roads are consistently congested due to their proximity to checkpoints: the first enters Za'atara checkpoint, the second runs to the DCO checkpoint.

Checkpoints, even when unstaffed, cause traffic jams. While the soldiers may have stepped out of the barrier, the physical barrier itself still exists. Accordingly, absent the military justification for stopping traffic, Palestinians are still affected by the physical skeleton of the closure policy. In the West Bank, checkpoints are not implemented by soldiers standing by the side of an otherwise unaltered road, but rather are permanent military installations. Passing through the structure of the checkpoint requires cars to slow down and thus creates a traffic jam and causes time delays. Open or closed, a checkpoint hinders mobility merely by the fact that it exists.

The traffic associated with checkpoints is compounded further by the fact that some major checkpoints lead directly into traffic circles. Two of the main checkpoints on

the route between Nablus and Ramallah, Huwwara and Za'atara have adjacent traffic circles. The traffic circle at Za'atara causes the most traffic, typically anywhere from 10-30 minute delays. The traffic circle lies at the intersection of highways 60 (a main North/South highway) and 505 (a main East/West highway) and thus has a significant number cars passing through each day. Traffic caused by an over stressed traffic circle, in of itself is hardly remarkable. It is, rather the placement of the traffic circle directly against a checkpoint, or vice versa that betrays a subtler effect of such traffic.

There are two levels on which the traffic at this particular circle brings Palestinian motorists into contact with elements of the occupation. The first and more obvious of the two is that the traffic backed up behind the circle often extends directly through the checkpoint. While the checkpoint may be open, the result of the traffic at Za'atara is that cars end up spending long periods of time approaching and moving through the barrier. While military personnel are no longer stopping them, Palestinian drivers are still routinely stopped at such checkpoints by the line of cars waiting to enter the traffic circle. While soldiers may not be staffing booths in center of the road, they are a constant presence, walking around the circle or checkpoint area dressed in full combat gear. During my fieldwork there were anywhere from 3-15 soldiers patrolling the area surrounding the traffic circle and the checkpoint at any given time. This by itself brings Palestinians, and particularly residents of Area A who live entirely under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority, into unusually close proximity with Israeli soldiers.

Secondly, these soldiers are not simply patrolling the area to monitor Palestinian mobility. They are there to protect Israeli settlers, for the traffic circles serve a double purpose as hubs of public transportation for both Israeli settlers and Palestinians.

Because there are two separate public transit systems for Palestinians and Israelis and likely (though sources on this are scarce) for security reasons, there are two bus stops, one for Israelis on the north side of the circle and the other for Palestinians on the south side. While soldiers are no longer in the booths in the center of the roads, they are positioned on the sidewalks guarding the Israeli bus shelters and the Israeli settlers that use them. There are no soldiers at the Palestinian bus stops. There is, however, a dirt trail where the grass has been worn away by Palestinian transit riders who cannot use the sidewalks within the traffic circles, which are reserved for soldiers and settlers, and instead approach their bus shelter through the field behind it.

Checkpoints both bring Palestinian together in the same space as Israeli settlers and soldiers and contain physical indicators of the inequality between the settler and Palestinian populations. That drivers have to move slowly through due to traffic not only impedes their movement, but also extends the time spent around the Israeli military and increases the exposure to physical markers of inequality in public transit. I was surprised to find how many people I spoke with had noticed the dirt path near the bus stop and knew what it was used for. Because of the traffic surrounding the checkpoint, the path, which would be easy to miss at typical highway speeds, is a visible element of the route from Nablus to Ramallah. In her study of the experience of traffic in Istanbul, Yazıcı (2013) argues that the close proximity of vehicles in a traffic jam puts disparities of social class under a magnifying glass thus tying inequality into the experience of sitting in traffic. Mobility is not the cause of inequity, but rather the instrument through which inequity becomes hyper visible.

Amahl Bishara (2015) describes something similar when she notes how, by slowing down the pace of movement, traffic causes the driver to remain near structures associated with the occupation for long periods of time. While the traffic jam she is discussing was caused by an accident and not a checkpoint, Bishara describes slowly making her way along a bend in the road with a USAID sponsored billboard informing the reader that the recent road improvements were a gift from the American people. For those Bishara showed pictures of this billboard to, however, it served as an artifact of the U.S.'s complicity in the occupation by maintaining an inferior road system for Palestinian use, separate from that used by settlers. Bishara states "USAID sponsored roads are not the only places through which Palestinians discern U.S. power but they are among the key sites visible in everyday life" (44). Like the USAID billboard, checkpoints, separate transportation systems, and soldiers are all tangible aspects of the occupation that Palestinian motorists are exposed to because of traffic jams.

The level of power the Israeli military holds over the Palestinian population is perhaps never clearer than in the regulation of traffic. While up to this point I have considered the experience of mobility assuming open checkpoints, it is important to note that due to their permanent nature, checkpoint can close at any time, stifling Palestinian mobility. When checkpoints are staffed, it is up to the soldier to decide whether or not a vehicle can proceed. Rather than being a regimented process, the decision of who will and will not be let through the checkpoint seems, to the drivers I spoke with, to be arbitrary. This speaks to the work of Doreen Massey (1994) who challenged a traditional, spatially uniform notion of time-space compression by arguing instead, that this compression occurs unevenly in different places and that those who control it via

control of the movement of others, hold power. In holding the ability to open and close checkpoints, the Israeli military are able to dramatically alter the way Palestinians experience mobility along a particular route. While I was not able to discuss mobility control with a member of the Israeli military, I spoke with an officer in the US Army who trained with Israelis and ran a team in charge of a network of checkpoints in Afghanistan. He explained that unpredictability is an essential tactic of a checkpoint network. He commented that the goal of such a network is to disrupt economic and social activities.

This unpredictability is furthered by what are referred to as ‘flying checkpoints.’ Flying checkpoints are traffic stops that are not associated with a permanent checkpoint infrastructure. They usually involve an Israeli army vehicle partially blocking a road as soldiers stop and check the vehicles that pass by. A *servis* driver who I spoke with commented that though the permanent checkpoints are generally open, flying checkpoints still cause major disruptions to mobility. From January to the end of August, 2017, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs documented 2,941 flying checkpoints on West Bank roads. This averages to 327 flying checkpoints per month (B'Tselem, 2017).

Over the first month and a half of my research, the situation on the roads was relatively calm. There was the occasional checkpoint closure or accident blocking the way, but for the most part, conflict-related restrictions were held to a minimum. On July 14, 2017 several Palestinian gunman shot two Israeli police officers dead in Jerusalem’s Old City. In response, the Israeli government restricted Palestinian access to the Old City and installed metal detectors at Al Aqsa mosque. This sparked two weeks of protests and clashes between Palestinians and the Israeli Army in which several Palestinians were

killed. It also caused a major increase in military presence on the roads within the West Bank.

One afternoon during the weeks of escalated mobility restriction, upon leaving Ramallah, the *servis* I was riding in was pulled over at one of these flying checkpoints (See Figure 1.1). As the *servis* joined a line waiting to proceed through the checkpoint, several cars made U turns to find another route. The driver of this *servis* waited in the line and upon pulling up to the checkpoint, the soldier asked each person in the car where they were from and to produce identification. He then went on to ask anyone who had said they were from Nablus what neighborhood they lived in. It was clear at this point that the soldier had exhausted his Arabic capacity and, with no one in the vehicle other than myself, speaking Hebrew or English, the possibility of any further questioning was limited. He ended the questioning, handed the IDs back and sent us on our way.



Figure 1.1. Flying Checkpoint The flying checkpoint described above. In the center of the photo an Israeli military jeep can be seen blocking the road. The soldiers stand to the right checking cars that pass through. Photo by the author.

Throughout this interaction there was another soldier with his gun resting on a parked jeep in front of us, pointed at the *servis* – a fact that troubled me immensely but either went unnoticed or did not affect the rest of the passengers. As I pointed out previously, checkpoints heighten the awareness Palestinians have regarding small indications of inequity, like those associated with public transportation. Yet through sheer repetition, they also relegate other more glaring signs like an aimed gun to the realm of the commonplace. As we pulled away, the other passengers immediately went back to sleep or started looking at their phones. This was clearly not the first time such a stop had occurred, nor perhaps, the first time having a gun pointed at them.

A number of Palestinians I spoke with speculated that these flying checkpoints were utilized on busy travel days in order to further disrupt travel. I found some anecdotal support for this claim as several flying checkpoints were placed around the West Bank on the Thursday before the Muslim holiday of Eid al Fitr, a popular day to travel in the West Bank. That Thursday, which fell a month before the clashes in Jerusalem and subsequent tightened regulations, I was returning from a day at the pool with my nieces, driving a car I had rented. Because I started out on the west side of Ramallah, I took a route rarely used by people traveling between Nablus and Ramallah. This road passes through a checkpoint called Atara, which, even during more restrictive periods, is rarely staffed. On this day, however, the checkpoint was not only staffed, but the soldiers were carefully checking IDs, though I was waved through as soon as I produced my American passport. Shortly after the Atara checkpoint, the road meets up at a T intersection with a more commonly used route between Nablus and Ramallah. As we approached the intersection I saw that to the south there was a jeep partially blocking the road and a soldier checking

identification. It seemed that rather than being an anomaly, the inspection at Atara had been a part of a wider system of restriction and regulation around Ramallah. It was unclear if the soldiers were looking for something in particular or simply regulating movement.

Israeli control of mobility and traffic is not, however, limited to checkpoints. There are several junctions on the route from Nablus to Ramallah that regularly have large back ups of traffic as drivers attempt to turn from one busy road to another. When the traffic is particularly delayed, Israeli police officers direct traffic from the center of the intersection accompanied by a soldier who waits off to the side of the road. Even in traffic jams that are seemingly unrelated to the occupation in any direct way, the control of the Israelis over Palestinian mobility is present in something as innocuous as a traffic cop. Junctions and checkpoint then both play a role in shaping Palestinian mobility as it is the traffic they cause that puts Palestinians in close contact with the Israeli military.

Protests

Often before you see a protest, you can smell it. The Israeli military uses what is called “skunk water” –a liquid with a putrid stench that, like its namesake’s spray, is difficult to wash away and lingers for days. Twice in the week following the Jerusalem attack, I found myself in traffic caused by a protest. In one case, the protest appeared to be a large and planned. It was the middle of the day on a Friday, as the *servis* I was riding in descended a hill on the way out of Ramallah. The traffic was so slow that press and international observers walking to the protest were keeping pace with the cars. Due to repeated protests, this particular section of the road out of Ramallah had a putrid smell for

over a week – a situation made considerably more unpleasant by the fact that this is a high traffic area and cars can sit in the smell for long stretches of time.

As we approached the hill leading to the traffic circle where the protest was in full swing, the driver of the *servis* rolled up the windows in a defense against the odor and followed the slow procession of cars in a left turn off the main road and on to the bordering alleyways. This is a common result of traffic jams in the West Bank. Cars are forced from the main roads onto back roads and alleyways, which are ill equipped to handle such a heavy load of traffic. This of course only compounds the issue of traffic back ups as the cars must slow down further still to accommodate the limitations of the road. I will return to this behavior in Chapter 3. In this particular case, the alleyways soon turned to a hilly gravel and dirt road bordering a construction zone. The difficult terrain brought the line of vehicles to a near standstill. A group of young protesters was standing at a shop corner looking back towards the demonstration when at once they took off running toward the construction site and away from the protest. One of the young women fell and began to cough as two of her companions doubled back, picked her up, and carried her out of sight. “It’s tear gas,” the driver commented, laying on his horn. Cars turned off and swerved around each other trying to escape the gas that would soon filter in through faulty AC systems. As we pulled away, a small group of soldiers walked through, braiding between the cars. Without intention, the *servis* and the other cars in the line were a part of the protest. The street, and particularly the traffic in the street, brings Palestinians into direct interactions with the state.

If large enough, a protest will attract a force of Israeli soldiers in armored vehicles. Certain aspects of the spectacle of these protests has become almost cliché in

the global picture of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Young men with keffiyehs tied around their heads obscuring their faces throw rocks at soldiers armed with Uzis in army jeeps. What is often left out of this picture, however, is what is happening just outside of the frame. These protests can take place on functioning roads and are carried out with the backdrop of a traffic jam filled with drivers and passengers who have suddenly become enmeshed in the demonstration, somewhere between participant and observer.

Street protests with the aim of causing a major disruption to automobility in urban areas are well documented globally (Juliawan 2011; Gillham, Edwards, and Noakes 2013) and particularly in the Arab world (Bayat, 2017). Bayat describes the street (particularly what he refers to the ‘Arab street’) as:

the chief locus of politics for ordinary people, those who are structurally absent from positions of power. Simultaneously social and spatial, constant and current, a place of both the familiar and the stranger, the visible and the vocal, the street represents a complex entity wherein sentiments and outlooks are formed, spread and expressed in a unique fashion. (Bayat, 2017)

My research suggests that Palestinians use the visibility of the street and particularly the attention and disruption caused by heavy traffic as a tactic in protests. One example are the street protests in which residents of the refugee camps (typically young men) occupy major thoroughfares that run along the borders of the camps, shutting them down to all through traffic. Street protests targeting the Israeli occupation are common and well documented, however what makes these protests by residents of refugee camps singular is that they are not always in reaction to the occupation. In fact, from an outside perspective (I was only able to speak to others commenting on the protests and not the protesters themselves), the protests had no one goal, but rather

seemed to be reacting to all layers of power imposed on the refugee population at once, including that of the Palestinian Authority. The protests take place in Areas A or B and are dealt with by the Palestinian Authority. Many of these protests are sparked in reaction to the actions of the Palestinian Authority and thus challenge the right of the government to control the streets.

Yousef, a dispatcher in charge of the intercity *servises* from Nablus to Ramallah described protests in the following way: “So, we have internal and external issues. Issues that are coming from the Israelis and at the same time you have internal issues...if there is a problem with the PA, they (the refugee protesters) close the street. If someone went to jail, they close the street, if there was a martyr, they close the street.” Yousef insisted that protests, which occur near Balata refugee camp on the outskirts of Nablus and Jalazon camp along the route entering Ramallah, were responsible for shutting down the roads at least once a week and causing major traffic jams, while other drivers disputed this level of frequency. Over the 9 weeks of conducting research I found the roads shut down due to refugee protests twice. These protests take their power from the significant delays they cause.

As I eluded to earlier, street protests not associated with refugee camps and specifically targeting the Israeli occupation are also commonplace. In addition to the protest I described in the opening of the section, the other protest I found myself in occurred the night before as a group of friends and I were attempting to cross from the West Bank into East Jerusalem through Qalandia checkpoint. We were riding in a 20-passenger minibus, which emptied as we approached the checkpoint. As we neared the turn off for the checkpoint parking lot, the bus slowed in the middle of the road and I

leaned over to look out the windshield. In front of us, blocking the way was a row of boulders that had been dragged into the street by protesters. The driver crossed into the opposite lane of traffic and we continued. Out the window we passed groups of young men chanting alongside trashcans and tires that had been set alight. At the sound of a series of pops the men scattered, disappearing into the alleys and shops that flanked the road. The driver informed me that the army was firing rubber bullets. We moved past the protest, which had closed Qalandia checkpoint and instead crossed into Jerusalem through Hizme checkpoint. I was struck by the use of boulders in the road to restrict mobility. This restriction was not aimed at our bus, but rather at army vehicles that may have attempted to drive along the main road. While this protest caused very little traffic because it was nighttime, the tactics used are common causes for traffic jams rooted in protests. I have witnessed this protest technique countless times in East Jerusalem, Nablus, and Ramallah. Both sides resist with closure and efforts to restrict traffic. (See Figure 1.2).

Checkpoints are common places to protest, not only by the Palestinians, but also by the Israeli settlers. There were a series of such protests directly following the Palestinian protests on Friday. While I was not able to interview any of the protesters, they seemed to be in reaction to the Palestinian protests or the killing of the Israeli policemen. Like the protests in Areas A and B, these protests can cause major traffic back ups. However, unlike the Palestinian protests, Palestinian vehicles caught in Israeli the same period of heavy protests, I spoke with a driver of a *servis* who was caught in traffic after an Israeli protest shut down the main road (Highway 60). He commented on



Figure 1.2 Protest Blockages Dumpsters that have been overturned in the street by Palestinian protesters. The traffic jam caused by the protest is seen on the far left of the bottom photo. Photos by the author.

the fact that the protest took place near a closed checkpoint. “The army closed the checkpoint and then the settlers attacked us. Of course, in traffic there is no escape. So, they can easily break the car. We were trapped between the checkpoint and the traffic.”

However, the impact of such protests is not always so obviously violent. Adam was a passenger in a *servis* that encountered the same protest coming from the opposite direction. In response to the protest, the military shut down the road to Palestinian cars letting only Israeli citizens through. The *servis* he was riding in then changed routes to avoid the main road, but soon received a call saying the new route too would be closing in 15 minutes. In response, the driver increased his speed significantly. Adam commented, “I think he was driving way faster than usual to catch that gate.” (Gates closing off certain routes were installed throughout the West Bank as a part of the closure policy of the second intifada. This particular gate connects the villages east of Nablus to the main highway.) “The roads there, they are very narrow roads between villages and sometimes through villages. At some points two cars can’t even pass at the same time.” While this experience was less violent, it reinforced the uneven power structure on the road and led to more hazardous driving. Protests, like checkpoints, cause traffic build-ups that bring Palestinians face to face with the Israeli military or settlers and expose the inequities inherent to the road system.

Finally, traffic is a compounding hazard that leads to other risks, which will be discussed in the following chapters. Traffic causes accidents (Chapter 2). Traffic jams encourage hazardous driving with people cutting lines or passing dangerously, which then brings policing into the conversation. Traffic forces drivers to take roads that are not equipped for the amount or speed of traffic that typically occurs on the highways in Area

C (Chapter 3). Ultimately, traffic not only slows down the movement of Palestinians, increasing their time of travel, but changes their experience of what it means to move between cities.

INTERLUDE: WAITING

Zeina lives in the village of Marda, which sits at the base of a large ridge. Atop the ridge is an Israeli settlement called Ariel, which is the fourth largest settlement in the West Bank with a population of nearly 20,000. The residents of Marda consequently often interact with settlers either indirectly, for example by clearing their flooded yards of the sewage that drains down the hill from the settlement, or directly, on the main road the two towns share. Zeina works in Nablus, 20 minutes to the north of Marda and occasionally waits for her rides on the main road. Unlike getting a *servis* in a city where one waits at a station, full of activity with dozens of *servises* coming and going, Zeina waits alone where the road that leads to her village meets the main road, shared with the residents of Ariel.

She describes seeing settlers with guns and being afraid that they might shoot her or kidnap her as the road is far from the nearest house. Because of this Zeina says, “I watch cars from a distance and when I see a yellow plate (Israeli car), I hide and when I see a Palestinian car I show myself.” This may seem an extreme reaction, however she went on to tell me about one particular instance when she needed to go to Ramallah for her work and so made her way to Za’atara checkpoint. Because Za’atara is 10 minutes east of Marda and falls directly along the Nablus-Ramallah *servis* route, Zeina would go to the checkpoint any time she needed to go to Ramallah and get in a *servis* at the checkpoint. *Servises* occasionally leave Nablus with an extra spot for this purpose.

Alternatively Zeina would call the controller in Nablus to reserve a spot.

In this particular instance, as she approached the area the settlers began to yell and point their guns at her. She recounted how she then crossed the road towards a group of soldiers and approached one who was speaking Arabic and told him that she wanted to go to Ramallah but was scared of the settlers. “Don’t worry *honey*,” he replied, “I will protect you, who could hurt this pretty face.” Feeling uncomfortable, she moved away from both the settlers and the soldiers. After that experience, Zeina said she was afraid and never again took a *servis* from Za’atara. She now rides with someone from her village if possible. If not, she takes a *servis* 20 minutes north to Nablus, only to turn around and get a *servis* back south to Ramallah, passing though Za’atara a second time.

Zeina’s day-to-day experience of mobility is shaped far more by taxi procedures and settler interaction than by open or closed checkpoints. And yet her experience is not solely influenced by elements of the occupation. Settlers and soldiers are a component of this experience but do not encompass it. When asked about the times she feels unsafe on the road, she first mentioned the interaction with settlers and soldiers but, after thinking for a moment, said there was one more danger when leaving her village. Wild pigs.

CHAPTER 2: GETTING STUCK

Six days after arriving in the West Bank I saw my first car accident. It was a hot, the temperature was in the 90s and the traffic was painfully slow. Thursday afternoons see the heaviest traffic of the week. The weekend for most Palestinians is Friday and Saturday and a rush of people are making their way home or setting out to visit family after finishing work on Thursday. The traffic was especially heavy on this particular Thursday afternoon, as it fell during the holy month of Ramadan, and the majority of the Palestinian population who are Muslim were traveling home in time to break their fast at sunset.⁴ Za'atara checkpoint had a large back up, and the driver of my *servis* jolted abruptly, turning onto a back-road detour. He laughingly apologized for the turn and promised this way was faster. As we bumped through the back road, which ran along a ridge, we could look down on a long row of cars lining up behind a slow-moving truck in the valley below. A young man next to me rolled his eyes, "It's always like this on Thursdays," he said, noting that I was watching the traffic jam below. He told me that if you're lucky, what should be a 45 or 50-minute trip between Nablus and Ramallah takes at least an hour and a half on Thursdays, but usually more, and it only gets worse during Ramadan.

⁴ Muslims observe the month of Ramadan by fasting from sunup to sundown. As a part of this fast Muslims abstain from drinking, eating, smoking, and sexual activity during daylight hours. The fast is broken with a large meal (*iftar*) eaten at the end of the sunset prayer.

As the driver assured, we reentered the road ahead of the traffic jam and returned to 80 kph. The roads remained fairly clear as we made our way through a low valley and the villages of Sawiya and Luban, their fields of wheat and sunflowers flanking the road. The man next to me joked that maybe he had spoken too soon and that we would make good time after all. However, upon rounding a curve and starting to climb the hill towards Ofra, an Israeli settlement, we came to a line of around ten cars at a near standstill. At the head of this line lay two cars splayed across the road, one facing north in the southbound lane and the other sprawling both lanes.

It appeared as though one car had T-boned the other. One car had significant damage to the front and the other to the driver's side. There was a heavy silence within the *servis* as we crawled toward the wreck, in sharp contrast with the chaos that was going on outside. The two drivers and one passenger were still inside the cars, the impact had clearly only just occurred. Drivers of Israeli and Palestinian plated cars were parking on the highway and rushing toward the women, both of who drove Israeli plated cars and appeared to be Israeli citizens from their headscarves (which are generally worn differently than the *hijab* worn by Muslim women).⁵ A Palestinian man ran past our *servis* as the driver tried to thread his way to the right side of the road which was clear of wreckage, debris, and the parked cars of those assisting the women. He yelled that he was a doctor, and a group of three Israeli men, standing at the door of the woman who had been hit, fell back to let him take their place. He bent to the window and spoke to the

⁵ Vehicles with Israeli registration have yellow license plates with black lettering. Vehicles registered with the Palestinian Authority have white license plates with green lettering. Both Palestinians who have permission to enter Israel or Jerusalem and Israelis can have Israeli registered vehicles, but only Palestinians have vehicles with Palestinian registration.

woman, who was visibly dazed though appeared uninjured. Her door was crushed in a closed position, and several men were trying to access the car through her hatchback.

I was struck by the bizarre singularity of the situation. Interactions between Palestinian and Israeli citizens are often tense, yet here the two groups were working in tandem. Similarly, the Palestinians who were assisting seemed not to notice the two armed Israeli soldiers who ran past us, shouting as we were exiting the confusion. “You look shocked,” the man next to me said, breaking the silence after the long minutes we spent passing by the accident. I told him that I had never before seen an accident so close or so soon after it happened. With a shrug, he told me that it happens all the time, particularly during Ramadan. I heard this view multiple times; the common consensus of passengers seemed to be that fasting gives drivers short tempers and lead feet.

As we continued toward Ramallah, approaching the DCO checkpoint, the tension in the *servis* eased, and the other passengers returned to sleeping or using their phones. The driver discussed the accident with the passenger in the front seat and commented that they would close the road for a while. The man next to me asked if I noticed that both Palestinians and Israelis were working together to help the women. When I replied that I did, and was a bit surprised, he nodded signaling that I had caught his point. “Palestinian or Israeli,” he said, “it doesn’t matter. It’s an accident, everyone helps.”

On my way back to Nablus in a different *servis* the same afternoon, the road where the accident had occurred was still closed. The driver continued straight at the roundabout taking us on the route referred by *servis* drivers as *Jalazon*, after the refugee camp it bypasses. The road was clogged with the heavy Thursday traffic, made only heavier by the approaching sunset and the number of cars detouring the closed road. The

passenger in the front seat asked if the DCO checkpoint was closed, clearly wondering if that was the reason for the delay. The driver replied, “No, the road is closed. I guess there was an accident.”

This accident gives a view into the complexities of Palestinian mobility that extend far beyond open or closed checkpoints. Here is a moment of destructive encounter in which the binary clash—of the Palestinian versus the Israeli settler or soldier—is remolded into a rare instance of cooperation. However, in later conversations when I recounted both the accident itself and the comment from the young man about everyone helping, several people disputed his analysis. Had the two drivers of the cars been Palestinians, they said, the Israeli settlers would not have provided help.

One result of a discussion of Palestinian mobility that moves outside of the context of checkpoints is an examination of other hazardous encounters that drivers may encounter on the road. While the closure policy may be unique to the Palestinian context, issues that are more generally associated with driving, such as accidents or breaking down, are also an integral part of the experience of Palestinian mobility. In this chapter I argue that hazards Palestinians encounter on the road such as accidents and breakdowns not only cause delays, but also like traffic, make elements of the occupation such as the uncertainty associated with fragmented administrative control and Israeli military police tangible to Palestinian motorists. They also require skills on the part of drivers to manage the hazard. These skills rely, in part, on an intimate knowledge of the power structures of the Israeli occupation and are essential to allowing Palestinians to move in the West Bank. However, rather than this backdrop fitting a simple binary of Palestinian versus

Israeli, it is instead a constellation of cooperation, conflict, and contestation in which neither the Palestinian nor Israeli population is a monolith.

Accidents

Traffic accidents are a common sight when traveling along Palestinian highways. Exactly how common is unclear. I searched for statistics regarding accidents, and found that the World Health Organization ranks the West Bank within the top 30 countries in terms of lowest car related fatalities with 5.9 deaths per 100,000 people. However, I had reason to question the methods of the report as it gives the West Bank a ranking of 6/10 for enforcement of child restraint laws, a fact which none of my research supports. When I mentioned this number to a mother of small children in the West Bank she laughed and commented “More like 0.5 out of 10.” It seems, from my research, that accidents are more common than the report suggests. While usually not as extreme as the one described in the opening of this chapter, during my fieldwork I would regularly pass by a car or two on the side of the road with a dent in one side or a smashed window. The drivers and passengers would generally stand around calmly, talking to one another and waiting for a tow or ride. Occasionally, there would be an Israeli soldier present if the accident was particularly bad or if it involved an Israeli car. Otherwise, the drivers would be on their cell phone (more on this in Chapter 3), presumably calling someone in the city to get a winch and give them a ride. This, I was repeatedly told, is how Palestinians deal with accidents. “No need to get the soldiers involved if you don’t have to,” a number of people told me. In this section I will first discuss the uncertainty and risk accidents cause

for Palestinians and then examine the way blame is used to assert competing narratives of inequity and guilt in the face of accidents.

The fragmented matrix of control complicates the experience dealing with an accident. In Area A, the Palestinian Authority has jurisdiction, and in Area C, the Israeli military handles accidents. Because Area B is under the administrative control of P.A. (Palestinian Authority) but the Israeli military handles security, the jurisdiction ultimately responsible for assisting with accidents that occur here is not always clear. This uncertainty as to by whom and in what way a hazard will be managed becomes a part of Palestinian mobility. In her study on anthropological perspectives on risk, Asa Boholm (2003) equates the uncertainty of a negative outcome with risk. Boholm argues the way in which people cope with risk depends largely on the trust they have in the institution in charge of managing it, with a lack of trust leading to avoidance. This is reflected in Palestinians' hesitation to involve Israeli soldiers when accidents occur.

Yousef, a *servis* dispatcher, told me about an accident one of his drivers was in on Al Quds street leaving Nablus. As he was still in Area A, though right on the border, he called the P.A. The official he spoke to told him that they could not go there according to the Israelis, so he should just take pictures and send them to the P.A. While it was not clear how the P.A. would use these photos, they were required in order to report the accident. This method used by the P.A. for dealing with the limitations of their administrative reach will be brought back in Chapter 3, but in relation to accidents, such an example demonstrates how Palestinian drivers are forced into an intimacy not only with the fragmented control set up by the Oslo peace process, but the bureaucratic failings that go along with it.

Adding to the administrative complexity, rather than there being one procedure for dealing with all accidents, the jurisdiction (unofficially) changes depending on the severity of the accident. Several taxi drivers told me that without injuries, the Israeli military will not come if the accident involves only Palestinians. They said that instead they would take pictures of the accident, and send them to the Palestinian Authority. Other drivers, however, reported having been in accidents in Area C with no injuries, which were dealt with by the Israeli military. In my own observations, I witnessed accidents involving only Palestinian cars that both did and did not have soldiers in attendance.

Like checkpoints, accidents add an element of ambiguity and arbitrariness to the experience of Palestinian mobility. The delays caused by accidents (primarily in the form of the traffic they cause) further hinder the ability of Palestinians to properly estimate travel time. Additionally, beyond the obvious danger of injury or damage to cars, accidents require a level of knowledge of the administrative blocks of the Oslo agreement and carry with them potential of interpersonal interaction with either Israeli soldiers or settlers. Palestinian knowledge of the closure system and web of borders is built through the embodied experience of movement rather than reliance on maps or other reference documents (Bishara, 2015). Palestinian *servis* drivers, for example, request that passengers put on their seatbelt as the car drives out of Nablus. They make this request when they cross a border from Area A to Area C, a border that would be indistinguishable to anyone who had not experienced the repercussions of tighter adherence to seatbelt laws by the Israeli police that go into effect on the other side of the invisible line.

When asked about the Israeli military and police response to accidents, the drivers and passengers I spoke with had mixed feelings about their performance. The divide fell largely along the line of drivers of private vehicles versus *servis* drivers. Some Palestinians feel that any interaction with the Israeli military is unpleasant and threatening. I heard this perspective mostly from the drivers of private vehicles, as well as passengers of either private vehicles or those who regularly use public transportation. The drivers of the *servises* that travel between cities who I spoke with, on the other hand, commented on the professionalism of the Israeli military or police, in direct comparison to the Palestinian Authority, in dealing with an accident in direct comparison to the Palestinian Authority. However, these feelings only held as long as both drivers involved in the accident were Palestinian. While some drivers that I spoke to felt comfortable with Israeli involvement in accident scenarios involving two Palestinian cars, none extended this comfort to an accident that involved Palestinians and Israeli settlers. These accidents, drivers were quick to point out, were likely to cause problems for the Palestinians involved. These problems manifest in two ways, the first being within the context of the accidents themselves and the second in the investigation and determination of fault.

Blame is a common feature in discussions about accidents. When describing accidents that involved a settler, people often cited alcohol use or reckless driving on the part of the settler as the problem.⁶ While some Palestinians drink alcohol, it is generally

⁶ Alcohol use or prohibition in the West Bank depends on the region or city. In more conservative Muslim cities with small Christian populations such as Nablus and Jenin, the sale of alcohol is prohibited and its use is generally done inconspicuously. Most cities in the northern West Bank fall into this category. In cities like Ramallah or Bethlehem with a larger Christian population, alcohol is sold in stores and bars.

done discreetly. It is forbidden in Islam and thus generally looked down upon by devout Muslims. There is no such prohibition in Judaism and thus drunkenness not only assigns blame, but also a certain level of moral judgment. Additionally, several drivers and passengers told me that the settlers drive recklessly but are never pulled over by the police. One driver in particular commented that settlers “act like there is nobody on the road but them. The police do not do anything to them.” Not only does blame highlight the tension between Palestinians and Israeli settlers on the roads, but also between Palestinians drivers and the Israeli Army. I found that drivers thought that in the context of an accident with a settler, the Israeli Army would be far more likely to find the Palestinian at fault. These drivers see the roads as a place where settlers engage in behavior that increases the chance of an accident, as well as a place where the uneven power structures inherent to the occupation mean that they are more likely to be blamed if such an accident occurs. This question of the risk of being blamed provides an example of Boholm’s (2003) argument that rather than risk being a phenomenon of its own, it is a framework from which to view the interaction between objects of risk (sources and targets of potential harm) and the evaluations they produce. It is the evaluation that in an accident involving a settler, a Palestinian is more likely to be blamed that urges Palestinians to drive cautiously around settlers. A friend of mine once commented that when he sees a settler hitchhiking he steers his car into the other lane to give them a wide berth. “They will jump out in front of your car making an accident,” he said, “and then the army will come and shoot you.” The risk associated with blame is thus part of the way my friend moves through space shared with settlers.

Most of the Palestinians I talked to had at least one story of an accident that involved Israeli settlers. Some of these were relatively small incidents that the person being interviewed had witnessed or been involved with, or a story that had been recounted to them by a friend. For example, one of the women I interviewed told me she had just heard such a story from her friend, Issam, a man in his 30s who regularly traveled between Ramallah and Nablus for work. He described a near accident he had been involved in a month before. Issam was exiting the roundabout adjacent to Za'atara checkpoint when two lanes merged into one. In merging, he explained that he had come close to colliding with a car driven by an Israeli settler. Issam pulled over in order to make sure no damage was done to either car. Upon coming to a stop he looked in his rearview mirror and saw the man running toward his car, reaching toward his hip and pulling out what looked to Issam like a gun. Issam then quickly pulled away from the scene and continued on to Ramallah.

In other cases, multiple people would tell me about the same accident that had happened somewhere in the West Bank involving settlers, and usually involving injuries or fatalities. I heard about one accident in particular from several different people. I was told that a settler who was driving drunk struck a *servis*, killing four of the Palestinian passengers. These stories become almost myth-like as each individual repeated the encounter nearly word for word. This accident in which four Palestinians were killed was discussed not only because of the accident itself, but also because of the Israeli reaction to the accident.

The coordinator of the *servis* station in Nablus was the first to inform me of this accident. He assured me that the fault lay entirely with the settlers and that they had been

drunk. Yet the Palestinian driver of the *servis* was the one brought in for questioning. He went on to describe what a hard time the Israelis gave the man though he emphatically repeated it was not his fault. The comfort with Israeli professionalism hence extends only so far, and the addition of the Israeli settler population with whom Palestinians regularly share the roads can cause such faith in professionalism to disintegrate.

While the closure policy and administrative fragmentation invite an examination of the military role in Palestinian mobility, in discussions of traffic accidents, the role of settlers features much more prominently in the dialogue than that of the military. A 2016 report submitted to the WHO by the Palestinian Ministry of Health noted that “Dozens of traffic accidents occur on roads outside Palestinian cities and towns in areas under Israeli control. Those roads are used by settlers and Palestinians, and Palestinians’ fear while on those roads of encountering settlers, being pursued by settlers or provocative actions by the Israeli occupation forces contribute to an elevated number of vehicle-related accidents” (Awwad 2016). This quote echoes the discussions I had about accidents in the sense that the impact of the military is noted, but is an afterthought to a focus on the role of and danger associated with settlers. Settler violence toward Palestinians is a phenomenon that is carefully monitored by NGOs and particularly UN organizations, however this monitoring primarily focuses on interpersonal violence and property destruction on Palestinian land that borders settlements. My research suggests that settler violence or the fear of such violence is an integral part of the experience of Palestinian mobility.

Assigning blame, however, does not only run along the lines of Israeli-Palestinian binary. For example, daytime during Ramadan is considered a dangerous time to travel,

as people are fasting and thus less focused and more impatient. *Servis* drivers in particular have a reputation for reckless driving both during and beyond the month of Ramadan. Among passengers of public transportation, *servis* drivers are almost universally thought of as unsafe drivers and thus are blamed for many accidents. The drivers themselves push back against this reputation insisting that it is drivers of private vehicles who are responsible for most crashes and *servis* drivers get blamed for accidents that are not their fault.

As one driver put it, “We are human beings and we make mistakes, but it is a double mistake if you are a driver. For example, if an accident happened with a *servis* driver, the entire world talks about it, but if it was a private car, no one mentions it.” He then went on to compare two accidents, one in which a *servis* driver had a heart attack and died, causing an accident in which all of his passengers were killed, and another in the city of Jenin involving a private car in which five people were killed. He complained that “everyone talked about” the accident involving the *servis*, even though the driver had died and thus it was not caused by his careless driving, whereas no one mentioned the accident in Jenin.

Servis drivers were emphatic that their reputation was unwarranted and that they are, in fact, better drivers than owners of private vehicles. Each driver I spoke with told me about a report that had recently been published that found that private vehicles cause more accidents than *servises*. I was unable to find the report and the drivers did not indicate who had written it, but it was well known amongst the *servis* drivers. At one point I was riding with a friend in a *servis* as he engaged in small talk with the driver. My friend commented that there seemed to be more police on the road that day than he

had seen previously, which steered the driver into a general discussion of the road conditions and hazards. This led him to bring up this report as a way of saying that whatever hazards exist are not the fault of the *servis* drivers.

For these drivers, the report served as empirical support for their narrative of blame over that of the passengers. Along with power disparities, such competing narratives are inherent to the understanding of mobility as place (Cresswell, 2006). Most of the drivers who brought up the report did so after lamenting the inequitable treatment they receive at the hands of the Palestinian Authority. Palestinian mobility is marked by hazards that reveal not only the tensions at the heart of the Israeli occupation, but also deeper conflicts within Palestinian society itself. Blame is an inherent feature of accidents and while the blame put upon settlers fits well within a Palestinian vs. Israeli binary, the blame placed on *servis* drivers does not. From the tension often felt between *servis* drivers and their passengers to the caution with which Palestinians maneuver in space with settlers to avoid potential assigned culpability from an accident, blame impacts the way mobility in Palestine is experienced by building distrust and inequity into the act of traveling.

Breaking Down

Car accidents expose those involved to a level of vulnerability by removing the protective shell a car provides. The Palestinian motorists are thus unexpectedly thrust into a context in which they not only are susceptible to the dangers of standing on the side of a highway, but also must make a choice to either rely on their community for assistance or come into close contact with either the Israeli military or settlers. Breaking down is

another example where such vulnerability occurs and also reveals the disparity between the treatment of Palestinians and Israeli settlers as well as the tactics they use to manage such vulnerability.

Like accidents, it is not uncommon to see cars broken down on the side of highways, some having been left by the drivers while others still have the drivers and passengers present. If the drivers are present, I observed that there is a clear divide between Israeli and Palestinian motorists in that if an Israeli motorist is broken down he or she will always have a military or police presence accompanying them. Though I saw this approximately a dozen times, the soldier or policeman was never involved in looking into the problems with the car or trying to fix it, but rather waiting with the driver until a tow truck could arrive. Palestinians, on the other hand, rarely had such an escort. In addition to the basic inequity, the escorts make visible the distrust the Israeli military and settlers have towards Palestinians. The escort demonstrates that, according to those policing the roads, settlers would be at risk of being harmed by Palestinians.

When I asked Palestinian drivers about this observation, it was clear they thought this was an absurdly obvious fact. My initial questions about this apparent dichotomy in assistance were often met with various verbal and nonverbal cues that essentially communicated, “Well, obviously.” After further questions, several took on a tone I heard often in my interviews that seemed to convey ‘that’s just how things are’. It was the same tone the young man in the *servis* used when he told me accidents happen all the time. Within these descriptions, there is both an accusatory note as well as one of powerlessness. In terms of breakdowns, drivers asserted, the Israeli military and police would only escort settlers. Additionally, in certain areas where the road is narrow and

especially winding, one man commented that Palestinians are not allowed to stop and help a broken-down car. However, he went on to say, if a settler's car broke down in the area the army would come and block the road if it needed to. Like in the discussion of accidents, the army's bias towards settlers' safety was prominent in the discussion about breaking down.

In lieu of the military assistance provided to the settler community, Palestinian motorists have their own tactics in dealing with breaking down, which involve relying heavily on their own social sphere. In response to being asked what they would do if their car broke down in Area C, each driver told me some version of the same procedure. They would call a for winch or mechanic for the car from a nearby village or city and call for a ride to complete the trip. The delay is frequently long because assistance is based on social proximity rather than spatial proximity. Thus, rather than contacting the closest mechanic, drivers call someone they know, even if they are far from the site of the break down. For example, if a *servis* breaks down, often they will call the controller, who will then send another van from the point of origin. Thus, the system of segregation and privileging settlers on the roads identified by Salamanca (2015) is present in the experienced mobility of Palestinians by slowing down the ability to respond to hazards.

I saw this process play out first hand on my way to Ramallah in a *servis* one afternoon. From the outset, the air in the *servis* smelled like chemicals and smoke and the driver had difficulty reaching any speed over 65 kph. At one point roughly 15 minutes into the trip, the driver stopped in an open lot. We were just outside of Nablus but had not yet turned onto the Highway 60 where the switch from Area A to Area C is marked by everyone in the *servis* putting on their seatbelt. He looked under the hood as

the passengers in the *servis* looked at one another, shaking their heads and sharing a feeling of an impending problematic trip. The driver slammed the hood down and we continued on to route 60 and into the mountains between Nablus and Ramallah. We drove for 20 uncomfortable minutes in which the smell inside only increased and the *servis* would spasm if the driver pushed beyond 70 kph.

After a final particularly forceful jolt just outside of the village of Sinjil, the driver turned into an entrance to the village and slowly climbed the hill toward the main road where he parked and took out his phone. Though I was sitting too far back in the *servis* to hear the conversation, I could see that he was trying multiple options and getting agitated. After 15 minutes of waiting, an older man made his way down the hill from the residential area above, dressed in pajamas, and spoke to the driver outside the *servis*. After speaking animatedly with the driver for several minutes, the older man turned again and headed back up the hill. He disappeared around the corner, causing sighs of exasperation to erupt amongst the passengers within the *servis*. The driver, perhaps sensing such disapproval, stayed outside the *servis* leaning against the hood. However, only a few minutes later a different man came down the hill in a functional *servis*. We were instructed to get into the new *servis* and continued on our way to Ramallah, leaving our old driver and his broken *servis* behind in Sinjil. This incident echoed the reliance on fellow Palestinians the people I had interviewed described as the driver risked climbing a fairly steep hill to enter Sinjil rather than stop on the side of the road. Additionally, rather than contact the military, the driver instead worked within the context of Palestinian society to manage the situation.

Breaking down on the shoulder of a highway is precarious and increases a driver's vulnerability to injury from being involved in an accident with another vehicle no matter the context. However, in the West Bank such vulnerability is heightened by the nature of the roads as shared space and managed by relying solely on the Palestinian community. Whether this is a forced reliance caused by the military refusal to serve Palestinians or a self-selection based on Palestinian distrust of the Israeli military and settlers is not as important as the fact that in breaking down, the divide between Israelis and Palestinians in this shared space becomes visible and is acted upon. Breaking down, like encountering traffic or an accident requires that Palestinians intimately know the administrative boundaries of the Oslo accords and possess a dynamic skill set and a reliable social network in order to manage the breakdown accordingly. Through the management of uncertainty and the assignment of blame, these hazards impact the way Palestinians move in the West Bank. In the aftermath of these breakdowns and accidents, power imbalance and the distrust it produces are made especially visible and become a part of the way Palestinians experience intercity travel.

INTERLUDE: SIGNS

“Look at that sign,” my friend said to me as we approached a traffic circle near the West Bank town of Huwwara, “The Arabic has been removed.” I looked up to see a road sign typical to the occupied West Bank. With its white reflective backing and black letters, it could be confused with an American road sign if it weren’t for the city names which are in Hebrew, English, and Arabic. The Arabic on this sign had been spray painted over, leaving only the Hebrew and English lettering. Over the weeks I began to notice that not only was this kind of vandalism relatively common, but that the signs themselves betrayed an even subtler linguistic erasure. On many of the signs for Jerusalem, for example, the Arabic text phonetically spells out the Hebrew name Yerushalayim rather than the Arabic name Al Quds, which is either relegated to parentheses or absent entirely. As it became clear that the signs that ticked along the winding highways of the West Bank were neither apolitical nor separate from the military occupation, it seemed that these they were making a statement about who the roads belong to and who belongs on the roads.

Road signs are meant to facilitate the movement of people. They sit at a tension point between visibility and invisibility. In order to function, road signs must be acutely visible (reflective lettering allowing them to be seen in the dark). However, they must be similarly invisible to the eyes of critical analysis. In other words, in order to function, road signs must be believed. They must be accepted as truth.

Signs along the major highways in the West Bank are created and maintained by an Israeli company according to specifications determined by the Israeli government. Thus, in subtle ways, such as the placement of Hebrew over Arabic, the use of Hebrew names, and the overrepresentation of settlements in comparison to Palestinian cities and villages, the Israeli government is presenting a truth that prioritizes the Israeli population in the West Bank. The Palestinian Authority, for their part have recently implemented their own system of signage in Areas A and B, which features only Arabic and English as well as only referencing Palestinian population centers. Each government uses signs to assert their own truth about who belongs on the roads in the West Bank. Taken together, these two sets of signs highlight the separation and conflicting narratives pervasive throughout the experience of Palestinian mobility.

However, after being produced, these signs are placed into a living ecosystem marked by tension between two competing narratives of nationalism and belonging. Once the sign is put up, it leaves the control of the state and becomes, instead, a canvas on which conflicts over who does and does not have the right to navigate the West Bank are fought with spray paint. Both Hebrew and Arabic text as well as both Palestinian and Israeli population centers are targeted by this rudimentary graffiti which typically involves no more than spraying over the existing text with black paint. What is clear is that beyond the message of the state, these signs are also being used by the populations in the West Bank to rewrite the truth of whose mobility on these roads and right to belong in this space is or is not valid.

CHAPTER 3: GETTING BY

I recently asked a Palestinian friend of mine if Google Maps worked in the West Bank. In the time I spent in Palestine over the preceding decade I found the technology so faulty I had not even thought to try during my fieldwork in the summer of 2017. He sent me the screenshot shown in Figure 3.1 and replied, “Yes, it seems it works.” Of course, technically this is true. He entered a destination and it gave him a route, travel time, and estimated time of arrival. However, knowing the proximity of village he had navigated to, I was confused. “Does it really take an hour to get there?” I asked. “No,” he replied, “It takes 15 minutes.” He explained that the route chosen by Google Maps is one way to get to the village of Talluza, but that it was not the fastest way.

He explained that there was a small road that Google Maps seemingly did not recognize that would dramatically shorten the drive. Reliance on such back roads in order to overcome the limitations placed on mobility is a common tactic used by drivers in the West Bank. Additionally, while Google Maps is imperfect in its applicability, cell phone technology is a vital asset in dealing with mobility under occupation. In this chapter, I will discuss the role detours and cell phones play in Palestinian mobility as methods by which to maneuver around those restrictions on mobility highlighted in the previous two chapters.

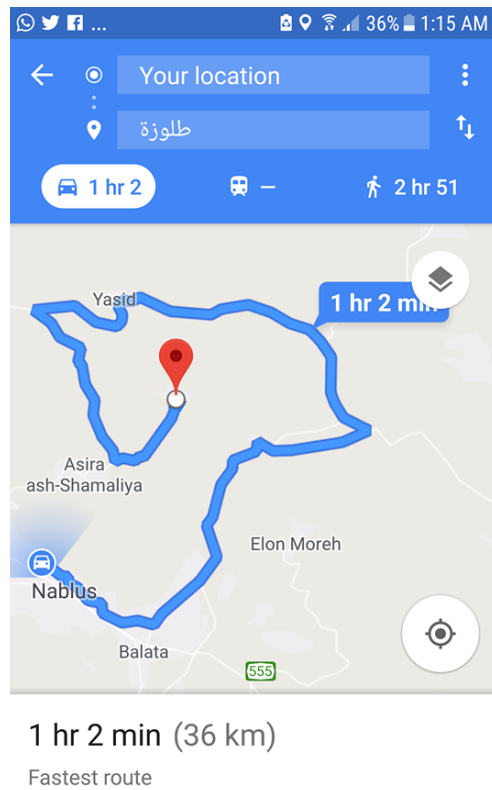


Figure 3.1 Google Maps in the West Bank. Screenshot of Google Maps route referenced above.

There is more to Palestinian mobility than the all-together cessation of movement. Currently, as the closure policy moves into a less restrictive stage, mobility is more likely to be transformed by barriers rather than hindered entirely. Thus, it becomes important to recognize the infrastructures that allow for such transformation as a fundamental component of Palestinian mobility. The vital question here is not how mobility is stopped, but how, in the face of restrictions and obstructions, it continues. Here I continue to draw on Larkin and other scholars' work on infrastructure, as well as what Simone (2004) refers to as 'people as infrastructure'. Simone states that urban life relies on "the ability of residents to engage complex combinations of objects, spaces, persons,

and practices. These conjunctions become an infrastructure—a platform providing for and reproducing life in the city.” While his focus is on economic viability in urban areas, Palestinians’ use of a variety of objects and social connections to build up their community networks serves a similar function. I examine how both the physical infrastructure of road detours and the social infrastructure of networks linked by cellphones allow for movement despite restrictions, while also presenting certain drawbacks. My interest is in how back roads and cell phones transform the experience of Palestinian mobility.

Detours

Detours have long been a factor in Palestinian mobility. During the second intifada, the ability to move from one place to another required a vast knowledge of the entirety of the road system in the area. The people I spoke to in their 20s and younger, who were too young to have driven during the second intifada, often commented that their parents know the geography of the West Bank better than they do because of the detours they had to make in order to navigate the network of road closures. One woman in her early twenties who grew up in Nablus remarked that when she has to travel to a Palestinian village for work, she has to find the village on the detailed maps of the West Bank created by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). When she discusses her work at home, though, her parents can tell her exactly where each village is and how to get there. The *servis* drivers I spoke with who worked during the intifada agreed. One commented, “Currently, there is no place in the West Bank we do not know, because we had to go through all these roads when the main roads

were closed.” While the restrictions of the intifada have diminished, the necessity of detours is still a factor in Palestinian mobility. In my analysis I will discuss two types of detours – those that are permanent and those that are temporary.

When I refer to permanent detours I am referring to roads that only came into mainstream use after either the partition of the West Bank into Areas A, B, and C in the Oslo Peace Accords in 1994 or during the closure policy period. The most famous example of this kind of detour is Wadi Al-Nar along the route between Bethlehem and Ramallah. Areas around Jerusalem were particularly affected by the Oslo partition, as Palestinians were no longer allowed to enter the city. This made traveling between the northern and southern sectors of the West Bank problematic and funneled most traffic through Wadi Al-Nar, a road poorly equipped to handle such traffic. Bishara describes the road as “unsafe, descending deep into a valley with several hairpin turns... The road is so notorious it is a kind of antimonument to closure itself”(Bishara 2015, 44).

While most of the drivers I spoke with drive primarily within the northern West Bank, many have stories about hazardous events at Wadi Al-Nar. I myself once took a very old *servis* from Ramallah to Bethlehem, getting stuck in severe traffic at Wadi Al-Nar. Because the traffic was at a slow crawl, the *servis* was unable to climb the steep hill while making hairpin turns. We eventually stopped and were instructed to get out and move to a newer *servis*, which the driver had called. While these detours hardly seem to warrant the name any more, considering they have been the primary route for over two decades, it is important to recognize them as such when considering Palestinian mobility. They are examples of the overall segregation of the road system and preference given to settler mobility (Salamanca, 2015). Wadi Al-Nar is an extreme example of a larger trend

in which the roads available to Palestinians are often not the most direct route and are profoundly shaped by the forces of the occupation. People I spoke with who live in the northern West Bank commented that, rather than larger detours like Wadi Nar, the northern West Bank has a series of small roads that were discontinued from use during the first or second intifada.

The second kind of detour, those that are temporary, are more visible and disruptive to routine travel. With temporary detours, drivers are forced to leave the main road in order to avoid heavy traffic, road closures, or some other road hazard. With checkpoints frequently unstaffed, currently these closures obstacles are more likely to manipulate mobility, rather than prevent it. As I argued in Chapter 1, checkpoints and road closures still have a significant impact on Palestinian mobility when they are not closed; even an open checkpoint can cause a slowdown in traffic that diverts drivers onto alternate routes.

Additionally, such a focus ignores the ways in which hazardous road conditions coalesce. A delay at a checkpoint may cause a traffic jam. Slow moving traffic on a highway heightens the risk of accidents and breakdowns. Thus, to avoid these hazards, drivers seek other routes, which are typically lower quality roads with sharp turns as they climb in and out of valleys which further increases the danger of the journey. These detours are inherently tied to other elements of mobility in the West Bank and are a common component of everyday Palestinian travel.

One example of such a detour that I witnessed with relative frequency in my fieldwork was one that was meant to avoid the traffic around Za'atara checkpoint. As I have already detailed, Za'atara checkpoint is situated at the confluence of two major

West Bank highways, causing significant traffic delays. Approaching Za'atara from the south, Highway 60 loops west to circumvent a small mountain before turning north again and climbing to the traffic circle and checkpoint. A few miles before the checkpoint, right at the westward turn of the highway, there is a small turn off which leads to a road that climbs the mountain that Highway 60 bypasses. Drivers who want to avoid a long wait at Za'atara frequently use this road. However, like Wadi Al-Nar (though not as extreme) this road includes sharper turns and steeper inclines than Highway 60.

Additionally, rather than a two-lane highway with clearly demarcated lanes, this detour is fairly narrow with enough room for two cars to pass one another, but quite closely.

Drivers who take this route do so to make up time and thus often drive faster than the roads design intended. While usually a fairly calm passenger, the most unsafe I felt during my fieldwork was on this particular detour.

Beyond topography, the lowest quality roads I drove on were also detours. One in particular was meant to avoid the traffic in the village of Huwwara. Only one driver took this route (though he did so on two separate occasions). Both times he was visibly frustrated by the Ramadan evening traffic that brought us to a standstill upon entering the village and turned off onto the detour after several minutes of stop and go. The road was so poor that the undercarriage of the 7-passenger van repeatedly struck the ground as we drove through pot holes, the road intermittently changing from dirt to gravel and back. The other passengers in the *servis* were visibly uncomfortable as they held the seats in front of them to stabilize themselves, but no one criticized the driver for taking the detour. From beginning to end (a span of around a mile) the FitBit I wore on my wrist mistakenly counted over 500 steps due to the jostling caused by the road quality. Not

only are detours dangerous, but also especially rough roads can cause material damage to vehicles. Such physical demonstrations of inequality in road systems have an impact the experience of those who drive along them (Mrazek, 2002). People I spoke with often commented that roads in the West Bank only get fixed if settlers use them.

One of the more extreme examples of a detour I heard about during my research was a road so notorious for the speed of the cars that take it that it is known as *sawareekh*, which is Arabic for ‘rockets.’ The detour runs between Ramallah and Bethlehem and is used to avoid the gridlocked traffic in the areas around Jerusalem. The road is notably winding and remote. Because there is so little traffic on the road, drivers are known to drive extremely fast. Though I never took this detour, Lama, a young woman who travels extensively for work, had taken it twice during the time I was conducting my fieldwork. She noted that she had never felt so carsick in her life and that everyone in the *servis* she was riding in felt ill by the end of both journeys. While this example is extreme, it points to the extent to which detour can impact the experience of mobility.

Not all temporary detours feature such treacherous roads. Some are costly, not in terms of increased danger or vehicular damage, but rather in time. The two detours highlighted above are both relatively short and are utilized to avoid areas of acute traffic. However, when the reason for the detour is more extreme, such as a closed road, the diversions are often not as short. When Huwwara checkpoint is closed, for example, the required detour adds an extra half an hour to the travel time of a southbound trip. This half an hour is spent on roads that connect outer villages and require several turns with no signage. There is ample opportunity to get lost, particularly at night when lighting is

limited or for a driver who is unfamiliar with the roads. Because a common tactic that drivers use to navigate unfamiliar back roads is to stop people walking in the streets of villages to ask directions, detours become particularly problematic at times where there are few people walking around.

Finally, it should be noted that while I divided permanent and temporary detours for the sake of analysis, any strict delineation between the two is faulty. Because the closure infrastructure is so prevalent within the West Bank, an extended closure may turn what was once a temporary detour into a permanent one or vice versa. For example, the route that enters Ramallah through the DCO checkpoint is new as of spring 2017. Before then, only Palestinians with certain professions, such as doctors and lawyers in private vehicles, were allowed through the checkpoint. Similarly, the route entering through Jalazon was also blocked to through traffic from the north up until the passed several years. When I lived in the West Bank in 2011-2012, the primary route to get to Ramallah was through Birzeit, a route that is now a rarely used detour.

Traffic, detours, accidents, and breakdowns all clearly impede the reliability of mobility for Palestinians and thus should be considered, along with checkpoint closures and restrictions, as constituents of the way mobility is both conducted and experienced in the West Bank. However, while these impediments have significant effects on Palestinian mobility and warrant examination, another set of infrastructures exists which work to overcome such mobility restrictions. In the face of physical obstructions, Palestinian motorists rely on social infrastructure to ensure minimal disruptions to their mobility.

Cell Phones: Navigation and Networking Infrastructure

The daily rhythm of my fieldwork was fairly constant. Five days a week I would travel from Nablus to Ramallah in a *servis*, spend an hour or so in Ramallah, usually stopping to run some errands or buy fruits and vegetables from the open-air market before returning to Nablus. One afternoon several weeks into my fieldwork, waiting for a fruit vendor to make change for the cherries I bought, I took my phone out to check the time. Because I kept my early 2000s Nokia phone on silent to avoid the unadjustable volume of the loud ring and text alerts, it was only then that I noticed I had missed several calls and had a dozen text messages requesting a call. Clearly something was wrong.

Subduing a sense of alarm, I bought credit to load onto my phone and called my sister. Without a greeting she asked where I was to which I replied that I was in Ramallah, about to start back to Nablus. She had called after hearing from her husband that a *servis*, originating in Nablus and bound for Ramallah, had crashed and that everyone on board had been killed. Although the accident only occurred only one hour before, several of my friends had clearly heard the same report and had also tried to contact me.

The town where I grew up in the United States is roughly the size of Ramallah and is connected by an interstate to another city close in size to Nablus. I have always had friends or family who commuted between the two. If there was ever a deadly accident along the road, I would hear about it within a day or two. So, I was amazed at how quickly the news of this accident had spread. Yet, I found that throughout my fieldwork, news of accidents, traffic, and checkpoints spread quickly. I frequently traveled to Ramallah with two friends, Adam and Naiem, in Naiem's car. Upon meeting

to set out, it was not unusual for both to have separately heard of an issue along the way that was causing some disruption. Way-finding technologies such as Waze and Google Maps are unreliable in the West Bank and thus most navigation relies on knowledge built through experience and shared amongst the Palestinian population (Bishara, 2015).

What I experienced directly that particular afternoon and witnessed nearly every other time I got into a vehicle during my fieldwork was something Amahl Bishara (2010) refers to as a ‘network of care.’ In her analysis of media and communication systems in Palestine, Bishara discusses the rise of emergency media, which served to connect Palestinians during the second intifada when mobility was most heavily restricted. Of particular note were the traffic reports that were broadcast on the radio, which served as a logistical tool that Palestinians utilized to navigate the closure policy. Bishara also highlights the role of the cell phone in creating networks through which Palestinians checked in with one another and relayed news when there had been a significant event. Bishara observed this network of care in a case where, shortly after the Israeli military fired shots into a refugee camp, her host began to call friends who had a better vantage point of the Israeli base and determine the situation. In utilizing these networks of care, Bishara notes that Palestinians during the second intifada “rallied against a politics of isolation” (Bishara 2010, 76). In this section I discuss the way such a network of care is utilized to ease the limitations on restrictions caused by traffic, checkpoints, and accidents. However, I also highlight the ways in which the Palestinian Authority uses cellphones as a surveillance device. This exposes the same distrust and perceived inequity between the drivers of *servises* and the Palestinian Authority from the discussion of blame in Chapter 2.

While the most stringent restrictions on mobility have eased since the end of the second intifada, these networks of care continue to play a central role in Palestinian mobility. The networks have expanded further to include an increase in cellphone use and new modes of communication including social media. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics nearly every home in Palestine owned at least one cell phone in 2016 and the number of cellphone users grew 750% between 2004 and 2014. Additionally, in 2014, 48% of Palestinian homes had access to the Internet, up from 9% in 2004 (Palestinian Bureau of Statistics, 2014). While these statistics are the most recent available, access to mobile and internet-based technologies is likely to have continued to grow over the past four years. There are now social media accounts that deal with Palestinian road conditions as well as twitter hash tags such as #zaatara and #huwwara (both of which are used in Arabic script as well as transliterated into English) which feature posts about the conditions at the checkpoints. Many of the students I worked with when I was employed at An Najah University in 2011 used these hash tags in their own posts and to find out what was happening in other areas of the West Bank.

During my fieldwork, a friend of mine told me that he used a Facebook page dedicated to traffic conditions and updates about the roads whenever he was planning a trip. The page is called 'Ahwal Al Turuq wa Al hawajiz-Filisteen'- Conditions of the Roads and Checkpoints-Palestine. It features posts concerning traffic, accidents, checkpoint closures, and military operations that impact roadways. Contributors report dangerous road conditions and the page publishes these photos and reports as a way for Palestinian motorists to determine what problems they may encounter along their way. The site has a mobile notifications service where people can sign up to have alerts sent to

their phones about road hazards. Posts generally include a photo or video of the accident/checkpoint/traffic jam as well as a short description of the impact the hazard is having on mobility. Like the phone calls Bishara observed in the second intifada, this page, and others like it, connect Palestinians through the sharing of information. In doing so, they lessen the unpredictability and risk of travel in the West Bank. However, while social media certainly plays a role in the network, one that is likely to grow over time, phone calls and word of mouth remain the tools most often used to pass information about road conditions for Palestinian drivers.

The level at which Palestinian *servis* drivers and passengers used their cell phones as tools of navigation was one of the first things I noticed from the beginning of my field work. *Servis* drivers are in constant communication with one another to determine which route will present the least resistance. For example, immediately after passing the accident I described in the opening of Chapter 2, the driver of the *servis* I was in got on his phone to call several other drivers to let them know about the accident and that the way would be blocked. Later that day, on my way back to Nablus, my driver took a call and asked what was going on at the DCO checkpoint saying there was a lot of traffic. While I could not hear the reply at the other end of the line, he then turned away from the route where the accident had taken place and instead took a slower route through the town of Beitin, which reconnects to the main highway just beyond the point where the accident had occurred.

While this network allows drivers to respond to large disruptions like an accident or a closed checkpoint, it can also provide a more granular view than that the social media accounts as drivers will have conversations several minutes long detailing the

conditions throughout the entire route. The utility of these phone calls is of such importance that several drivers informed me that they have a special deal with Wataniya (one of the mobile service providers) which provides them with 1000 call minutes at the beginning of every month. These drivers stressed that they need the minutes because they are always talking with one another. Because holding a phone while driving is illegal in Area C, most drivers use headphones. Yet, the use of cell phones is another example of the way that issues of mobility connect as the use of cell phones while driving may increase the risk of getting in an accident.

The banal utility of this network is particularly perceptible when entering Ramallah. There are three primary ways to enter the city from the north. The first and typically the fastest runs almost entirely in Area C and enters through the DCO checkpoint; the second utilizes lower quality roads with lower speed limits and enters next to the Jalazon refugee camp; the final and least commonly used route enters from the west and takes the drivers through the town of Birzeit before entering the city. Because the route passing through the DCO checkpoint is the fastest, on high traffic days it can feature long delays. Additionally, unlike the route that passes by Jalazon, drivers must pass through a checkpoint where soldiers are occasionally checking cars, which causes lengthy backups or may close entirely. In such cases, drivers may call one another to advise the Jalazon route. On rare occasions there are major issues with both routes and calls go out advising the route through Birzeit. By using one another, drivers are able to maintain a fairly up-to-date knowledge of the traffic conditions and any hazards they may encounter. Thus, while they do not rely on internet based platforms for navigation or route conditions, by using this network, drivers are able to construct a picture of the

routes that includes which areas are experiencing slow or stopped traffic or lane closures from an accident just as one might see roads turn from blue to orange or red as traffic increases on their Google Maps directions.

Within the context of mobility, the network of care based on the cell phone goes beyond the dissemination of information. On the road, the network is also vital to the provision of services. As previously alluded to in Chapter 2, cell phones are used both to navigate road hazards and to manage them. When a *servis* driver gets into an accident he will first call the controller in charge of his route. This call serves two purposes. First the controller will then send the driver assistance and second, the controller will inform all the other drivers on the road of the issue. Similarly, the importance of cell phone use to the network of care was clearly evident in the case in which the *servis* I was riding in broke down. The driver was able to dip into connections in a village along the way in order to navigate the hazards inherent to automobility.

However, in the hands of passengers, cell phones can also create an extended surveillance network for the Palestinian Authority⁷. In the summer of 2017 when I was conducting my fieldwork, there was a new push by the Palestinian Authority to crack down on dangerous driving, even in areas outside of its jurisdiction. In order to do so, the Ministry of Transportation encouraged passengers to take cellphone videos of their *servis* drivers if they felt the drivers were driving dangerously. This program bolsters the narrative that *servis* drivers are reckless and exacerbates the distrust between the drivers and the Palestinian Authority discussed in Chapter 2. The passengers could then send

⁷ Though I am highlighting the way passengers use cellphones for surveillance activities, it is important to note that passengers also contribute to the network of care by keeping friends and family updated on their time of arrival and letting others who may be just setting out what the conditions of the road are.

these videos to the ministry, which would punish the driver by taking away his license. Rather than passing information person to person, in this case information is passed directly to the authorities to be acted upon. This program was seemingly well known as *servis* drivers, passengers and the ministry official that I spoke with all brought it up. I once observed a man record almost the entirety of an hour-long trip from Ramallah to Nablus with a driver who was driving particularly fast. Additionally, one of the *servis* drivers who works the route between Nablus and Ramallah described a case where a passenger had reported a driver for reckless driving using this system. The driver was then called into the Ministry of Transportation where his license was withdrawn. The driver recounting this situation said that interaction between the driver and the ministry employee became heated to the point where the ministry employee assaulted the driver. While this case was exceptional, many of the *servis* drivers I spoke with expressed concern about this kind of surveillance. Additionally, I heard multiple accounts from riders who had observed their fellow passengers taking video or pictures of a driver, though no one said they themselves had done so.

Cell phones, thus, not only allow for a network of information that enables drivers to more easily navigate the hazards of the roads and passengers to keep a current arrival time but allows the Palestinian Authority to control such navigation remotely, effectively extending its administrative boundaries. The same social infrastructure that helps Palestinians avoid contact with hazards and the elements of the Israeli occupation that go along with them, brings drivers under the surveillance of the Palestinian Authority. The closure policy and the administrative fragmentation of the West Bank put limitations on Palestinian mobility. Yet, I found that the utilization of both social and physical

infrastructures were an essential aspect of Palestinian mobility and allowed drivers to diminish the effect of these limitations by finding ways to get by.

CONCLUSION

In March of 2018 several construction projects were initiated in the West Bank aimed at creating alternate roads for settler use so that they might avoid high traffic areas. These projects are the result of a 230 million dollar investment in settlement development pledged by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in late 2017. The projects include significant funding for roads that allow settlers to bypass Palestinian population centers and, while details of the plan are still being written, the infrastructure portion of the initial development agreement includes five new highways that will be for settler use only.

While such roads will alleviate some of the traffic on the roads remaining for Palestinian use through the absence of the settlers, the plans will also advance the implementation of an entirely separate and thus inherently unequal infrastructure system for Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank, providing facts on the ground for the normalization of West Bank settlements. In addition to forthcoming developments in road infrastructure, the introduction of 3G internet service in the West Bank in March 2018 has the potential to alter the way and the extent to which Palestinians rely on their cell phones (often smartphones) to utilize their social networks. Mobility in the West Bank is highly dynamic and such developments suggest that a continuing academic and humanitarian focus on the experience of moving around the West Bank is necessary.

In this research I have found, through broader themes of traffic, hazards and infrastructure, that far from being diminished by the Israeli military's easing of mobility restrictions, inequality and distrust are still very much present in the ways mobility is experienced by Palestinians. Humanitarian organizations interested in mobility, which currently focus primarily on access and checkpoints, would benefit by expanding their view to include traffic, detours and accidents.

It would also be valuable to modify the UN and NGO monitoring of settler violence against Palestinians to include a greater attention to accidents and other interactions in the roads. Reports of settler violence typically involve overt violent clashes that result in injury or property damage and focus on exceptional places where Palestinian cities and villages directly border settlements. Palestinian owned olive groves near settlements garner particular attention as they often extend to the border of settlements. Such areas are at a higher risk for hostile settler interactions and warrant the attention they receive, however roads in the West Bank also fit the description of bordering and shared space. And yet, perhaps as a product of their ubiquity, they do not receive the same attention. When roads are considered, reports focus on aggressive, premeditated acts such as settlers shutting down a road with the threat of violence or throwing rocks at Palestinian cars. What is missed here is the potential for violence that is present in more typical and unpredictable hazards of the road such as accidents or breakdowns. As this research suggests, settler violence or the fear of it, is a significant component of everyday Palestinian mobility, a fact that is not currently integrated into the work of humanitarian organizations focused on protecting Palestinians from such violence.

While this study focused on highways and intercity travel, mobility within cities is another area of Palestinian mobility that deserves further consideration. With most Palestinian population centers falling within Areas A or B, a significant proportion of routine Palestinian mobility occurs entirely under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority. The relationship between *servis* drivers and the PA government or the tension between *servis* drivers and passengers regarding safety highlight conflicts and power structures within Palestinian society itself that factor into mobility. Such analysis moves beyond an Israeli vs. Palestinian binary that has the potential to obscure the complexities of relations among Palestinians. Far from being a faultless alternative to Israeli military rule, the control of the Palestinian Authority is contentious and foregrounds political and social fractures in Palestinian society, some of which predate the occupation itself, and many of which are likely to bleed out onto the roads of Palestinian cities and villages.

Through a focus on everyday mobility, this research makes contributions to three broader areas of scholarship. First, it shows us how spatial awareness and mental mapping is emerges not only through long-term memory based in singular events or the built environment, but also through repetitive, mundane experiences within imbalanced power structures. Second, it shows us how ways of being mobile and getting by the scrutiny of the state can be everyday forms of resistance. Third, it shows us how mobility plays a key role in the way violence and oppression can become normalized and part of the everyday.

Through examining the politics and tactics of the everyday, this connection between the mundane and the extraordinary and its place in the lives of Palestinians becomes especially visible. In this study, my focus on routines illuminates an iterative

aspect to the way drivers manage their movement, and alter their spatial perception of the roads on which they travel. This is principally evident in the way *servis* drivers map out their daily routes and modify these routes along their way. These mentally planned routes are not only remade everyday, but, through the use of cellphones, are continually updated throughout the trip in order to accommodate the dynamic nature of mobility in the West Bank. While the drivers occasionally bring memories of the second intifada or other periods of the occupation into conversation when discussing routes, their focus lies in daily details of roads closed due to an accident or heavy traffic at a certain junction. Although mental mapping and spatial awareness has been a key area of academic interest in the Middle East, most of these studies have focused on the way it is influenced by memory and the legacies of conflict or colonialism (Gregory, 1995; Said, 2000; Dora, 2006). In these works, spatial awareness is strongly connected to memory of cataclysmic events and the material environment, which illuminate what Said (1995) describes as “changing constellations of power, knowledge, and geography”. Dora, for example, considers role both the exodus of the European population from Alexandria following the Egyptian revolution in 1952 and developments in the city’s built environment play in creating a nostalgic European mental image of Alexandria. Yet, both the the material environment and the temporal exceptionalism of dramatic events fail to capture the role everyday events can play in the way people understand their place in the world and the spatial manifestations of power in their lives. More broadly, my research speaks to the fact that spatial imaginaries are forged as much through day-to-day-events – like sitting in a traffic jam – as they are by through the enduring physical manifestations or catastrophic events associated with the military occupation.

The everyday utilization of such maps as well as further ways in which Palestinian drivers take into consideration administrative borders and tension with settler population are what Michel de Certeau (1980) refers to as “tactics” of interacting with larger political structures. In moving along the roads, Palestinian drivers repeatedly manage encounters or, more significantly, consciously avoid interactions with the state. Building on scholarship on everyday forms of resistance such as Baumann’s (2016) discussion of the manner in which, through mobility, Palestinian residents of Jerusalem resist ethnic segregation and uneven provision of municipal services, we see that the use of detours to avoid military barriers or cellphones to warn of flying checkpoints are also “weapons of the weak” (Scott, 1985).

Finally, this research reveals the everyday processes through which violence and political oppression become normalized in a society. The people I interviewed brushed over many of the questions I asked regarding the Israeli military’s treatment of settlers versus Palestinians or the theoretical protection the military might offer Palestinians on the road with nonchalance. When I asked Zeina if she now felt she could rely on soldiers to help manage her interactions with settlers described in the ‘Waiting’ interlude, she looked at me for a moment to see if I was joking and, upon seeing I was not, laughingly said “Oh god, of course not.” For her, and many of the other Palestinians I spoke with, the oppressive actions and harsher treatment of Palestinians in comparison with settlers was so entrenched in their experiences that it became truly unremarkable. It was only through repetitive observations that I noted aspects of segregation and power imbalances within the road system that, for many drivers, had become obscured by normality. While its manifestations on the experiences of Palestinian mobility are exceptionally diverse

and dynamic, the overall oppressive presence of the Israeli military on the roads of the West Bank serves as its constant background.

The experience of traveling around the West Bank often weaves the extraordinary into the mundane. Something as routine as a getting stuck in a traffic jam has within it, the potential to involve being held at gunpoint. And yet, the experience of traveling around the West Bank is just as often one that weaves the mundane into the extraordinary. A street protest covered by international media has behind it, a line of cars just trying to get home. Thus, in making sense of experiences of Palestinian mobility it is essential understand somewhat mundane hazards of the road as indivisibly connected to the extraordinary inequity and injustice of the Israeli occupation.

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